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CONQUERING AND TO CONQUER

A Story of Rome in the Days of St. Jerome

BY THE AUTHOR OF

"CHRONICLES OF THE SCHÖNBERG-COTTA
FAMILY."

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LEIPZIG

BERNHARD TAUCHNITZ

1876.

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TO CONQUER
AND CONQUERING

3 story at home in the house of St. George



LEIPZIG
BERNHARD TAUBERT

1876

10. 10. 1876

CHAPTER I.

"CONQUERING and to conquer;" yes, that abides our motto for ever.

You gather around me, children of my old age, here in this city of Treves, on the banks of the Moselle river, on the shores of the great tide of nations that is ever rushing down on the Roman world; children of every tongue and kindred and people, rescued from every kind of wreck and wretchedness, the children whom God has given me in place of those He took from me in my youth.

You gather to hear the old stories from me, your foster-mother, the old Abbess Læta.

You will not let me call myself old?

Yet I have lived through a good portion of two centuries, and it seems to me sometimes through more than one life. And I have seen more than one world fall into ruin.

You, who have become so dear to me, children of the North, have not known me long.

The voices that guided my girlhood have been silent more years than most of you have lived. Of the voices that gladdened my matron life few are heard more in this mortal world, and of those few scarcely two are within speaking distance of each other, scattered in Egypt, Palestine, Africa, even in remote Britain; and only one is within my hearing, though that, thank God, is dearest of all left to me, since it is vouchsafed to me, unworthy, to receive the Blessed Eu-

charist from the hands of the priest Paulinus, my son.

“Desolate and to be desolated,” might seem the fitter motto for our life in these distracted days, perhaps some of you think, so sweeping are the ravages that have wasted us, so near are those that threaten.

Cities turned into solitudes, gardens into deserts, sanctuaries violated, a whole Christian world in Africa crushed; *Rome sacked*. Rome, Christian Rome, in the hands of the barbarians, invaded by her own roads, conquered by her own lessons. And the world she conquered and taught grown so used to her humiliation, that the words “Rome captured” fall as a commonplace on your ears, and scarcely startle you.

Rome, Conqueror, Empress, the Rome of the Cæsars, the Rome of the Martyrs, in the hands of barbarians and Arians! The

churches of the saints given up to the savage and the heretic? Miseries so unutterable pressing everywhere, crushing all that is most enduring, violating all that is most sacred, that the desolations of my own little life seem scarcely to be lamented even by me! And in the mysterious, inexhaustible North, ever-fresh thunder-clouds gathering, fresh torrents pouring forth!

When will they cease? The world has scarcely time to enervate one invading race with its corruption, or the Church to inspire it with her life, when another follows, new, barbarous, vigorous, and sweeps away corrupter and corrupted, teacher and learner in our common devastation.

And yet the word is true—*Conquering and to conquer.*

A life is in the world which shall never perish, because a Divine Life has been lived

in the world which can never be forgotten, and has enkindled a divine life in man which shall never be quenched.

Out of the sack of Rome sprang the great triumph-song of Augustine. The "City of God" was enshrined in the corrupt city of the Cæsars, and outlives it. The City of God confronts the barbarians. Wave after wave of the great host may break against her walls, may seem to overwhelm them. But wait a little. The waves have subsided; the City abides. And worse than all from without, luxury and pride and selfishness undermine the City within. Tower after tower, which seemed a bulwark of her strength, totters, crumbles, falls. But wait a little, and in some obscure corner, some insignificant outbuilding, some hasty contrivance for filling up a breach has grown into a fortress; and the City abides.

Conquering and to conquer.

Conquering, not triumphing. The conflict is never over.

Conquering, not merely overthrowing. Possessing what is overcome.

Conquering, not as the lightning conquers the oak, by rending it; but as the acorn conquers its husk by expanding it.

Conquering by living, by growing, by dying, by rising again; not by destroying. Destroying nothing evil until the good in it has been saved.

But therefore conquering slowly, imperceptibly, so that those who judge by the outside may often say, "This is not gain, but loss, not life, but death; the acorn has is beauty, but this shapeless, tender thing, what is this?" So that those who count by days may often say, "This is not progress, but retrogression; our fathers fought their

fight and conquered, but on us the enemy rushes with fresh forces and new weapons which they knew not; the old dykes were good against the old floods, but the beat of the tide has changed, and they stand as mere ornamental banks; and where are the materials for the new?"

Conquering as the husbandman conquers the barren earth by toil and skill. And the conquests of toil are slow.

Conquering, not as anger is cowed by fiercer anger, or hate by bitterer hate, but as anger is subdued by patience, and hatred is conquered by love. And the conquests of patience and love are slow.

Conquering as God conquers, by giving His Only Begotten; as Christ conquers, by offering up Himself.

Never in any other way; by giving, by sacrificing, by suffering.

Children, have you understood?

You have had your Abbess's sermon, and now you want her story. My poor, barbarian children—children of a race of children, you, at least, have not got beyond the pictures and the stories. Alas for any of us when we think we have!

For the whole world—earth and seas and sky—is God's ever-changing picture-writing; His symbolic painting is fresh on the walls of our dwelling-place every morning. And the Holy Scriptures, Old and New, are His story-books. And the power which is renewing the world is the story of three years of One Life.

When *we* think we have grown too wise for the pictures and the stories, it means that we have grown too stupid, that the pictures have lost their meaning for us, and the stories have become mere words; and

God sends us little children who will listen to nothing, only because it is told in fine words. God sends us a little child, as He sent one to the great Augustine; and we have to leave the making of philosophies and the rearranging of the worlds, and come back to the faith, to "take up" the old Book and "read" at the bidding of an infant voice.

When the world thinks itself too wise for the pictures and the stories, and begins babbling of the All, and the Nothing, and the Absolute, of entity and nonentity, God suffers the barbarians to come and beat us back to the beginning of history again, to toils and pain and peril, and the old first heroic lessons—how to fight and how to endure.

When the Church thinks herself too wise for the Old Story, and begins philosophizing

about consubstantialities and essentialities, God sends young races of the nations such as yours to drive her back to Bethlehem and Nazareth and Calvary; to test her faith with martyrdom, and her meaning by having to explain it to those who have no respect for words save as keys to realities.

And then, my children, we find that Bethlehem and Nazareth and Calvary, and the stories which touch the babes, are deep with the unfathomable wisdom the sages never sound.

The twilights are long in this land. We will gather in them, since you wish it, and talk of the old times—we who are like a little shipwrecked company tossed together by many storms from many wrecks.

Mine has been, perhaps, as long a voyage, and as stormy as any. And yet among you who like to call me mother are many with

hair as white as mine; mothers left the last of lost families, as well as orphans bereaved of parents' care. Some of us have been slaves in households that are reduced to ashes; and some come of houses more ancient and mightier than mine—from old Greek colonies at Marsilia and Arles, from old priestly Gaulish families, more than one from pillaged palaces in Rome itself.

It is a world of wrecks, and we are salvage tossed on this shore for a little while. And the very house we are in, this old Provincial Palace, is a wreck. At first, it was given to my husband's father in reward of some service his tribe had rendered the empire. And twice the Goths have sacked it. Yet still the mosaics and frescoes of gods and goddesses, the porticoes, and marble seats and fountains contrast strangely with our poor, coarse, brown garments. Strangely

and joyfully. For, as I think, these halls of feasting had never sweeter music in them, or brighter festivity, than the laughter and gambols of these orphan children, or the chants Ambrose taught us, with which we love to fill the silent night.

Here, as I sit, the red light shines on the river as it flows down to the great Ocean which flows round the world and in time must reach the inner central sea which bathes the shores of Italy. And my mind follows it on and on, till I seem to see the old home in the garden on the Aventine, my father's house. I press on among the sweet-scented trees, the oranges and roses, across the threshold, with the *Salve* on it, into the marble courts with the images of our ancestors, by the chamber with the couches and table of feasting, up into the little upper chamber, which was the cell of

my mother's maiden sister, my aunt Antonia, the Christian virgin, friend of Paula, disciple of Jerome. Not a trace of luxury was suffered there. A coarse oriental mat-bed, woven by the monks of the Thebaid; two wooden stools, one high, and one very low for me; an oaken chest which had been my mother's, and now contained the coarse garments of my aunt; a reading-stand, with rolls of the sacred Scriptures, Greek and Hebrew, of very delicate finish, copied by my aunt's own hand; the box of ivory letters from which she taught me to read, and which were the only toys she altogether sanctioned. Austere as the little cell looked, it never seemed dull to me. Dulness consists in the bondage of life to routine; and an intense life pervaded every corner of that bare chamber, which, child as I was, I could not but feel.

Garments were heaped up in one corner

for the poor; in another, stood phials of healing and cooling drinks which she had distilled for the sick. And the letters her delicate hand traced on the parchments were letters of a whole literature of divine song and story, of which, from her lips, I never tired.

And through the little window (little windows used to let in much light in our Rome) I caught a glimpse of the Capitol, still crowned with temples and statues of Jupiter and Mercury and Venus, before which some men and women still burnt incense, and where, in hours of dismay or peril, many more secretly came to worship. The battle with paganism was quite real still, though the hosts of the enemy were discouraged. And the cell where the Christian maiden spent days in fasting and nights in prayer, and the Capitol with its crown of

idolatrous temples, confronted each other as forts of two opposing camps.

Who could say that another Julian might not sit on the throne of the empire, or even another Diocletian? My mother's mother had worshipped as a child in the catacombs, as the only safe place for Christian assemblies, and had seen the procession which led the virgin Agnes to her cruel martyrdom, along the streets of Rome; and when her youngest daughter, my mother, was born, she had dedicated her to God by that name so recently made sacred by martyrdom. My aunt Antonia was named after another order of confessors, the hermit Antony, whose marvellous life of self-immolation Athanasius of Alexandria had recorded for us Christians of the West during his exile here at Treves. Two distinct streams of Christian legend, two distinct types of Christian life, two

distinct species of Roman character, were present with my childhood through my mother and her sister.

My mother died when I was nine years old, but not too early to leave a vivid impression of what she was and what she loved stamped on my heart.

If Christianity had never reached them, I think the sisters would have represented two beautiful diverse types of the noblest womanhood of our old Rome. Antonia, the vestal virgin, guarding the sacred fire for the sacred hearth of the Patria, severed from all close human ties, not to selfish isolation, but to the large cares and services of patriotism; repressing all softer emotion, not to chill the heart, but to concentrate its fires in one fervent altar-fire of patriotic religion. Agnes, the true Roman wife, tender and devoted, capable of stoical endurance by force of

passionate love; like Portia, of wounding herself to see if she were worthy to share the perilous death of Brutus; like Arria, of plunging the dagger in her own bosom before she presented it to Pætus her husband, and cheering him to the suicide to which he was sentenced, by murmuring, with a smile on her dying lips, "Pætus, it does not hurt."

My mother could have done that; and certainly she would not have failed in the smile.

Before that bare cell of austerity and charity became my refuge and my school, and the penances of Antony and the anchorites, told with deep voice and kindling eyes, became the wonder-stories of my childhood, I remember another chamber where there were doves, and flowers which I helped to weave into garlands for the graves of the

martyrs; and there was another cycle of sacred legends told in another voice, gentle and caressing; legends, indeed, of victory over pain, and of heroic death, but in which the victory and the heroism, and the joy and love inspiring both, seemed to dissolve the pain and death; so that the memory left on my heart is not so much of the sword and the axe and the cruel flames and more cruel persecutors, but of souls flying to heaven like liberated doves; of palms of Paradise, brought by hands of martyrs to those who still lived to suffer; of dying words of forgiveness transforming executioners into martyrs; of blessed maidens crowned with roses; of victorious youths weaving triumphal palms; of One more joyful and more forgiving than all, sustaining, inspiring, welcoming all. My mother was to die young; and it seemed as if the peace and light of

heaven already beamed on her, and the weights and measures of heaven and the chronology of eternity were already hers; so that the afflictions of this present time were indeed "light" to her estimate, and but "for a moment." I think she must have felt she was to die young, and must have done her utmost to engrave deep in my heart those joyous images of faith and hope, that I might have communion with her spirit where she was so soon to be. The coo of doves, the colour and fragrance of flowers, the soft caressing touches and enfoldings of a mother's arms, the tones of a voice which seemed to have gathered into itself all that was tender in nature and human life—all these were in that bright chamber of my mother's, opening on the garden. And yet brighter to me than all these are the memories of a very different chamber, to which she delighted to take

me; underground, entered by winding subterranean passages, lighted by feeble glimmers of the lights we carried, of the chambers where she told me the blessed martyrs slept in peace, waiting for the Voice of unspeakable joy to call them.

So close her love and faith wrapped me round, that I have no recollection of chill and darkness in those chambers of death, but only of a rosy light as of dreams, of a happy stir as of youthful feet with soft, innocent laughter, treading the grapes of the vineyard of God; of perfumes as of incense, and budding vine-leaves; of a voice clear and protective as of a Good Shepherd calling his sheep to Him.

Most clearly I recall one visit. I suppose because it must have been the last we paid together to those sacred places.

It was on a Sunday morning.

It was a frequent custom, then, amongst the Christians in Rome to pay visits on Sundays to the sepulchres of the martyrs, and especially to the catacombs. The sacred roll of the noble army of martyrs had scarcely yet been closed. Jerome once went the round with his school-fellows. He spoke of the darkness and awful gloom of these crypts, deep under the earth, dimly lighted by broken gleams through shafts and holes. But it was different to go there as I went, with garlands and lamps, holding my mother's hand, and attended by the slaves she had freed.

The early sun made lovely traceries of shadow on the paths as we walked through the vineyards, now and then breaking into the familiar ancient hymns, or into fragments of the new and glorious *Te Deum*, which some say Ambrose of Milan sang first by

inspiration at the baptism of Augustine. Singing through the sunshine and among the vines, the home-born slaves bearing baskets full of flowers, my mother, Antonia, and I, all Christians; I with one hand in my mother's, and with the other holding my own little votive garland, which we had twined together.

How joyous everything seemed that resurrection morning! Bountiful vines, not laboriously trained, as those in your North, on stakes, but wandering in lavish luxuriance at their own will from tree to tree or from trellis to trellis, festooning all the hillsides in one leafy bower; and then into the narrow entrance, down the long flight of stone steps, long so carefully hidden from the persecutors, through the winding passage into the sepulchral chambers so familiar to us.

On each side they lay asleep, my mother

told me, each narrow bed sealed with its own slab, and on the slabs tender words rudely cut, often in the haste of pressing peril:—

“Victorina, in peace and in Christ.”

“Arethusa, in God.”

“Peace to thy soul, O Zosima.”

“Redempta (O redeemed one), in peace.”

“O Eucarpia, thou sleepest in peace.”

“O Philomena, in peace be thy spirit.”

“Vivas Deo. Thou livest, mayest thou live, in Good.”

She read them to me. I have seen them often since and read them for myself, but they come back to me always in the tones of her voice. She used to say, “Not a few of these were martyrs; they died in tortures. And those who laid them here and loved them dearly saw them suffer. Yet not a word of vengeance, not a word of the anguish. It was lost in the joy.”

Well I remember the pressure of her

hand as she stooped to point to me another inscription:—

“Innocentius, an infant, sweet soul, who lived seven years, eight months.”

“Younger, my darling, than thou!”

And then we came to the child whom I, an only child, used to appropriate as a kind of heavenly sister.

This inscription, as were the greater number, was in Greek. The early Roman Church was more Greek than Latin.

“Peace to Fortunata, our sweetest daughter.”

And beside these tender words of farewell, they had cut a simple rude engraving of a child with a bunch of grapes in her hand sitting under leaves.

To my childish imagination the rudeness of the carving was no hindrance. I saw that child; I used to dream of her, under the trees

of life in paradise, waiting for the parents to whom she was so sweet.

They had met long since, my mother said, and found each other dearer and sweeter than ever. There I left my garland. The child should not be forgotten even on earth. And then on to the open chambers, the walls covered with paintings. There was Orpheus charming the beasts with his lyre:—

“Even thus,” she said, “our Christ loves to win us by joy.”

Doves, vines, music, as in my mother’s chamber, as in the luxuriant vineyards outside. The Shepherd playing on the pipes to his sheep, gathered around him, or sitting watching them under a tree, as in the pleasant fields outside.

And lastly, we come to the two pictures of which she spoke to me most that day. One was of a woman standing with arms

outstretched and face lifted to heaven, and open palms, as of one who knew that good gifts were to be poured into them.

"Læta, my sweetest child," she said, "if ever I were taken away from thee, think of me like that, looking up to God and praying for thy father and thee. That is what I should be doing always."

I remember looking up to her with wondering eyes. What could she mean? She would never let herself be taken from me, any more than she would let me be taken away from her!

Yet I drew closer to her, pressing to her side until we came to the picture we loved best of all; the Shepherd with the little kid on his shoulders, which Tertullian would have banished as giving too much hope to the fallen.

The little kid, the little, wilful, lost, wild,

wandering creature, with nothing to promise its being ever found, except that the shepherd delighted to seek the lost.

And kneeling there with her arm around me, she whispered, "My darling, that is what thy Lord is like; that is what He is always doing; always, always that."

No more words. Only those two pictures breathed into my heart by the music of my mother's voice, by the music of her daily life. And so we sang the *Te Deum* together, and left our flowers in the crypts, and went back through the galleries, up the stone steps, into the daylight, into the sunshine, which seemed to glow and burn and laugh like an imperial illumination as we went home through the vines.

And after that for a long time the sunshine seemed wholly to depart from the world.

My mother became too ill even to see me, until at last she was too ill for anything to hurt her any more, and I was taken into her chamber for the farewell.

No last audible words, only one long last kiss, one long wistful look at me and at my father, as she held my hand and his together in her feeble, failing clasp. No last words, save a murmur on the dying lips which no one else could understand.

But although I never could say so to any one, lest I should hazard the inestimable treasure of that last message to doubt and debate, I felt sure I knew what she meant—

“Good Shepherd!” I felt sure she murmured *“Both!”*

Then came a time of darkness into my life, darkness that might be felt. The catacombs that are quarried under all our homes

opened beneath ours, and our brightest and best had to be borne thither. And it was long before I found light enough to see the words of faith and the pictures of hope and joy on the walls. But they did shine into my heart at last.

God who in divers manners spake of old unto our fathers, in the childhood of the world, through dreams and visions, does still, I think, speak so to the babes and children now.

I had sobbed myself to sleep one night, and in the morning when the grey light was fast growing into the glow, between me and the sky—whether in the little chamber, or outside in the sky—whether in a vanishing dream, or itself a vision vanishing into day, I never knew,—my mother stood beside me, beautiful, erect, strong, and joyous—her eyes fixed on me in a long gaze, no longer help-

less and wistful, but tender and protective as of old, and then, looking upwards to heaven, with outstretched arms, like the Orante, the praying matron of the catacombs, she seemed to float upward, and the words sounded in my ears, soft and clear as water slowly trickling into a deep well, "*Good Shepherd—Both.*"

And all that day I went in the joy of that thought, or dream, or vision.

The two pictures she had so loved, the matron erect in the attitude of confiding, joyous prayer; the Good Shepherd clasping round his shoulders the little wandering, wild, lost kid, came back to me.

My mother was like one picture.

Our Lord was like the other.

My mother pleading for us with Christ. The Christ loving and caring for us as tenderly as my mother. And I a little mother-

less lamb, no more forlorn, but wrapped round still, always, with unutterable love. The world a wilderness, but still penetrated by indefatigable love, seeking, finding, and bringing home the lost.

The Church, though still toiling through a wilderness, yet herself His flock, sought and found, that she might share for evermore the toil of His seeking and the joy of His bringing home.

Heaven the fold, with all the weariness and peril past; but not the seeking or the bringing home. For the Good Shepherd, whose heart was the fountain of all the love, the inspiration of all the seeking, was *there*; and my mother was there, sharing his cares, and asking Him to do what He delighted most to do for us, for us "both."

It was in this way that through the blessed martyrs, and the early catacombs, and my

mother, the Christian religion first penetrated my heart. It was in this way, through that dying farewell, that the purpose of my life found me; not to make myself holy through the ascetic life, but simply to bring my father home from paganism, to come both together, to the Saviour and to her, and then to seek and to bring home as many more as I might. Children, do you also understand? For whatever else has to be learned or unlearned, this I am sure is true and will never have to be unlearned, only to be learned better and better for ever, as we rise from step to step, from the lost to the found—from barely rescued wanderers to be seekers of the lost and feeders of the sheep, and so on and on to deeper sympathy and fellowship with the Good Shepherd. For in the wilderness He is seeking and finding still, and in the fold He is leading them beside the living waters still, for ever.

And now the twilight has grown to dusk; and the hymn at the lighting of the lamps must be sung; the night-watchers must prepare for their watch by the sick, and the children be laid to sleep, that to-morrow's work may begin with hearts and bodies fresh for work and praise.

And now the twilight has grown to dusk;
and the hymn at the lighting of the lamps
must be sung; the night-watchers must pre-
pare for their watch by the sick, and the
children be laid to sleep, that to-morrow's
work may begin. **CHAPTER II.**
for work and praise

WHEN my mother was gone, I seemed first to learn that there was a world. Before, all had been home, and she the warmth at the heart of the home, and the home a warmth at the heart of the world, warming and illuminating more or less all around. Now the home itself seemed to become a world of fortuitous atoms, full of contrasts and divisions; of people kept close together, but few of them bound closely together; of contrasts which involved collisions; of things that had become mere unmeaning shapes, instead of ivory letters of a sacred language,

the meaning having died out of them when they fell from her hands. The contrasts were sharp enough in our little world, in our little epitome of the great tumultuous Rome outside.

My aunt Antonia was a Christian of another type from my mother. Perhaps another type of Christianity was, and is, to reign in the world. My father was not a Christian. I can scarcely say he was a Pagan. He recognised the beauty in all religions; but he sacrificed in no temple. He thought my mother's religion, like herself, the loveliest thing in the world. But I believe he thought she had made it.

"She would have made the worship of the Syrian Astarte pure," he said, "and the service of Moloch kind."

He admitted, however, that Christianity, *her* Christianity, had given a last tender per-

fection to her character. "Beautiful? No doubt her Christianity was beautiful. True? Who could tell? True as far as it was beautiful, as all beauty is. For, what is beauty but the truth, or harmony, of each being to its idea? True as a history? What history is true? What story of anything keeps true ten years after it has happened? True as a divine doctrine, to be lived and died for? What is divine doctrine? The same, it might be, as divine; but scarcely the same for any two human believers. Certainly not the same for the two sisters, Antonia and his Agnes."

To my mother (he thought) it meant love, and patience, and joyful hope, and the Shepherd seeking the lost; goodness an instinct, and duty a delight; the Epicurean ideal, with goodness itself for its embodiment. To Antonia, disciple of Athanasius, of the Egyptian anchorets, and of Jerome, it meant renuncia-

tion, self-mortification, judgment, first on oneself, then on the world; the Stoic ideal of virtue as a conflict; the enemy being in her interpretation every natural emotion of the heart. Instead of the Good Shepherd seeking the lost, the austere Judge, condemning the lost; heaven, a state where they neither marry nor are given in marriage, to be ushered in by earthquake, and blood, and fire; hell, a state of eternal torture, which might be irrevocably fixed for any one by a mistake in translating a Greek abstract term into Latin, a language to which abstractions were unnatural.

“Did Christianity embrace both these doctrines? This was possible. But then there must be as much room inside the Church as outside; and as little certainty. He would wait a little outside, at all events, until he saw at which gate it was best to enter. Being

a Greek, it would be more dangerous for him to be wrong about a particle, since he could not, like a Roman, plead in his defence an inaccurate translation, or the incapacity of the language."

Meantime Antonia went on fasting and praying in her solitary cell, and he saw the rigid features and the emaciated form, but little knew how much of this sprang, not from severity, but from tender depths of anxious pity for himself.

That cell became now my refuge and my school. My mother's chamber was deserted. Her own slaves had been emancipated, according to her dying request, and a benefaction given to each wherewithal to begin some calling. My father said it was little gain to any to transfer them from slavery to the ranks of the base, idle population of Rome, who lived on the imperial doles, and

lavished their spare pence between the public baths and the games; but he faithfully fulfilled her dying wish.

My father saw me seldom; his passion of grief for my mother's loss, to him utter, and without hope, made the sight of me often intolerable to him. Whenever I saw him, he gave me a few passionate caresses, and he always took care that the most generous provision should be made for my dress and amusements. But I felt dimly that I crossed his path like a shadow or a ghost, that in his very caresses there was a sense that he was but striving to embrace the shade of a lost joy, so that I instinctively kept out of his way, and found the nearest approach to the old love and warmth, not in the lavish gifts my father provided for me, but in the bare cell of Antonia, where I felt wanted and welcomed. But oh! how I thirsted to be, not a shadow,

but a light to him; thirsted for him to have some happiness in me.

The sense of harmony passed out of my life with my mother; a peace, a tranquillity, a joyful buoyancy, which I found again only in those primitive pictures in the catacombs, and in the Holy Gospels. I lived in fact, and gradually became conscious that I lived, in a world of discord and combat, of storms and jars.

Antonia's combative assertion of her faith led my father to a more pronounced expression of his. To what he called her religion of "death in the present and life in the future," he opposed his of life in the present and abandonment of the future. The festive images of the old Greek Paganism reappeared on our walls and furniture, on our drinking-cups, and plates, and tables; vine-wreaths, and flowers; airy, dancing forms, genii with torches, cupids, or the infant Bacchus; not, indeed, the

base, degrading images of degraded Paganism, but those of the natural joys of exuberant life. He shrank from what he called the coarse semi-barbarian Roman feasts, estimated by their cost and their enormity, at which scribes attended to record the weight of the fish and game, and the rivalry consisted in the comparative distances from which the viands had been brought, and the comparative prices which had been paid for them.

"These Latins," he used to say, "can only estimate their enjoyments by weight and measure. Their very music is prized by the weight of the enormous organs they drag like thunder along the halls, and by the number of the mimes and dancing-girls hired from the theatres. Their music would have seemed to Athens of old as the rumbling of camp wag-gons, and their pantomimes as the rude jests of soldiers on a campaign. They have invented

nothing to amuse themselves save the fights with men and wild beasts in the arena."

The vulgarities of appreciation by quantity were his detestation. Our whole home might have been placed in one of the halls of some of the rich freedmen; but the carving of every column, the colour of every mosaic had been carefully chosen. And in our villa on the Appennines nature herself was trained to supply the painting, and sculpture, and music; vines and flowering plants festooned the columns; the portico framed a gallery of pictures of hills, and woods, and streams; birds, never disturbed, sang among the copses in the garden; the coo of the doves sounded low and soft from the depth of the woods; and in the garden a cool stream from deep sources in the mountain babbled over a pebbly bed into a great stone basin, from which it plashed with a delicious sound of abundance

into a deep pool shaded by oranges and fig-trees. "Beauty," he said, "ennobles. Luxury debases. Beauty was the worship of the old free Greeks, or, at least, of old free Athens." It was certainly his.

To share these delights he used to invite small congenial companies of Greeks, who shared in his contempt for dull and degenerate Rome, and of young Romans who fancied themselves refined into Greeks by ridiculing the bad taste of their compatriots.

There was never any noisy rioting at these festivities. Christians were invited to them as well as Pagans, if they were men of cultivation. He even had clerical guests, who could give such polished invitations into the Church as that which one of the pagan pontiffs met by the reply, "I have no objection to make myself a Christian at once, if you will make me Bishop of Rome."

The wealthy Christians of those days were very tolerant of wealthy Pagans. Conversions were to be effected in masses, in tribes, in nations. In private life religion must take its chance with other accidents of birth or breeding. Christianity, in conquering Paganism, had, like Rome in conquering Greece, been partially reconquered. The whole tone had become secular; the whole horizon had become once more limited to earth.

Nevertheless the conflict between good and evil continued, as it always will, since the Divine Lord has been born into the world, and has left it, first by dying, and then by ascending, to be the victorious battle-field of those who follow Him.

The majority of the Christians of Rome lived much like the Pagans. But in cells like Antonia's the higher life breathed afresh, and there the noblest things of the expiring Pa-

ganism as well as of Christianity were kept alive.

Old stoical Rome, old heroic Rome, as well as the martyr spirit of the early Church, survived in the little band of men and women of which Antonia was one, whose chief centre was in the palace of the widowed lady, Marcella, on the Aventine.

CHAPTER III.

THE little society on the Aventine was marvellously quickened when I was beginning to pass out of the unconscious paradise of childhood into the keen observation of youth, by the arrival of a Dalmatian monk who had once studied in Rome, but had since passed many years in the practice of the fiercest austerities in the desert near Chalcis, in Syria.

It was a choice circle, that Christian community of the Aventine, as select and exclusive in its different way as my father's.

The noblest patrician houses of Old Rome were represented in it.

My father, who was wont to amuse himself much at the marvellous pedigrees claimed for the semi-barbarous new rich men of the society around us, never questioned the genuineness of the pedigree of Marcella and her mother Albina, the descent of Furia from Camillus, of Fabiola from Fabius Maximus, nor the right of Paula, on the maternal side, to place in her atrium the images of the Gracchi and the Scipios, and on the paternal that of Agamemnon.

The fire which lit up the whole community had been fresh kindled by the presence of the great Athanasius.

Forty years before, when the last persecution under Diocletian had only ceased thirty years, and the virgin Agnes had been so long in Paradise, in 341 the great Athanasius, for his fidelity to the Catholic faith after leaving his exile here at Treves, had paid a visit to Rome.

The faith, my children, is Catholic, but the Catholic faith has more than once been saved for all by the fidelity of one against all. Let us explain the paradox as best we can.

Athanasius had triumphed at Nicæa. But the faith had scarcely yet triumphed in the world. Wherever he came the heroic man left seeds of truth and life. At this Treves he wrote the life of Antony, which helped towards the conversion of the great Augustine.

In Rome he touched to a more vivid life the germs of self-denial and devotion which were already stirring in scattered Christian hearts, breaking through the mass of worldliness and avarice around.

Two Egyptian solitaries accompanied him and shared his exile. One, Ammonius, silent, indifferent, moved amidst all the tumult and

splendour around, as a soldier passing through an enemy's country, or as a man in an ecstatic trance. He carried his solitude with him; the silence and the terrible solemnities of the desert seemed reflected in his impassive and austere countenance. He would visit none of the wonders of Rome, save the tombs of St. Peter and St. Paul.

The other, Isidore, went everywhere, interesting himself in all people, and in everything of human interest. But everywhere he spoke of the mysterious joys, the terrible self-tortures, the demoniacal assaults, the superhuman victories of the desert where Antony the hermit was still living. These three Egyptian holy men met not seldom at the great old Roman palace on the Aventine which belonged to the widowed Lady Albina.

Albina's daughter, the little Marcella, then

a child of seven, used to listen to the wonderful desert stories, wonderful as the labours and combats of the heroes, in far-off fabulous times, yet actually then going on in the salt, sandy solitudes of Nitria, between the hill and the sea. But while the mother listened admiringly as to some Oriental tales only to be marvelled at in this prosaic West, into the heart of the child they sank as tremendous realities to be brought into her own life.

The passion for solitude and the ascetic life took possession of her as the passion of patriotism or of love.

She consented in her youth to marry, but losing her husband after seven months, nothing would persuade her to a second marriage.

Wealth untold, an alliance with an imperial family, her mother's entreaties — at

first tender, afterwards indignant — moved her not.

Albina became angry and severe. An enthusiastic appreciation of other people's asceticism, even a mild asceticism of her own, were not unsuitable to a Roman patrician. But a Thebaid in Rome had not entered into her thoughts.

The more single purpose, however, naturally prevailed. Marcella took a house with a garden in a suburb of Rome, and made of the garden her desert, her Nitria, her Thebaid, reserving also a portion of their palace on the Aventine, where she and her mother still lived, for reunions among the noble Roman women who, like herself, were moved to the ascetic life.

So the holy community of the Aventine grew up around her. All who aspired after a higher life were attracted thither, among

these Antonia and my mother. There were no vows, no rules, as in the monasteries of the East. Aged matrons, widows, maidens, young married women, some like my mother even married to Pagans, frequented the Oratory in the palace of Marcella.

It was indeed a choice community, composed almost entirely of women of patrician birth, gathering to itself all that strove to rise heavenward out of the indolent luxury of the city, and fascinating many who merely sighed after the higher things, but remained fettered to the lower. Yet such sighs are something. Do we not call them aspirations?

The Oratory was the central point. There they met for prayer in common, for the chanting of hymns and psalms, and the reading of the Holy Scriptures, for work and prayer, the prayer itself being a real work.

While in the palaces around "the library was as hermetically sealed as the tomb," and mental labour was as hateful as bodily toil to the young nobles, who passed their time between the circus, slumber, and dice, these Roman women found their delight in searching into the Greek and Hebrew Scriptures. Whilst Roman men, and even the Christian clergy, were (as Jerome said) borne through the streets in luxurious chariots, robed in Oriental silks, with slaves carrying umbrellas and fans for them, these Roman ladies in plain brown dresses found their way among the poor and sick to succour and to save.

Alas! if she could but have seen it, not the Church only, but Rome herself, would have sought her safety in that little nucleus of energetic healthy life, which combined the ascetic simplicity of the old Re-

public with the beneficence of the Christian Church.

It was not till it had already existed twenty years that I was old enough to remember it.

And then, about the year 384, the whole community, from its innermost grave and fervent disciples to its outermost dainty and fashionable admirers, were deeply stirred or widely fluttered by the arrival of the Dalmatian monk, who thenceforth became its centre and inspiration, Jerome of Aquileia.

Eloquent, impassioned, quick to anger, quick to forgive, the desert in which he had passed so many years of anguish had certainly not quenched the fire nor slackened the vehement velocity of his nature.

He made no pretence of being passive or indifferent about anything. Solitude and

the ascetic life had no more calmed or subdued him than a narrow channel calms the mountain-torrent which has cleft it, and is deepening it incessantly. His words rushed along in a tumultuous torrent, bearing with them any idioms, Greek or Hebrew, any image from any quarter which suited his purpose. His spare form lent force to his energetic features, and the cheeks, hollow with fasting, to his flashing eyes. And some who were thought able to judge said he was as eloquent as Cicero; new idioms ceasing to be barbarous in the fervent heat with which he fused them into the language.

I remember well my first sight of Jerome. It was in the Oratory of Marcella's palace on the Aventine.

He spoke in our own language, in Latin. He came of a good family from Aquileia,

but had been educated in Rome. In his native Aquileia it seemed that a choice company of young men had been inspired, and knit together by the same aspirations, for a higher and harder life, which had created the community of Marcella's palace on the Aventine. His face was bronzed with the sun of the Syrian desert; his slight form was emaciated by those days and nights of fasting and anguish of spirit, which had culminated in delirious fever amidst the sands of the desert.

We had heard of it all through rumours of pilgrims, and especially through his own letter to his friend Heliodorus, imploring him to come and share the delightful horrors of the desert.

The very word desert had an inexpressible fascination for our imaginations.

To me it was the scene of all the marvels

which in Antonia's cell had been the horror and the delight of my childhood.

To my mother's stories of Perpetua, the African martyr-mother, and Agnes, the young Roman martyr-maiden, had succeeded the stories of the fierce conflicts of the Anchorets with the devils, and with their own all but unconquerable sins. I had been told of "three zones" of that mysterious, marvellous world. On the limits of the desert, monasteries where the rank and file of the monastic army fought, toiling for the maintenance of the brotherhood, singing and praying; till one and another were impelled to pursue the enemy farther into the depths of solitude, to wander by twos and threes, picking up such stray food as grew wild or was brought them at chance intervals, sheltering themselves in forsaken cisterns and wells, or in caves and dens of the hills; till, at last, yet

farther the passion for solitude and hardship drove them on to the innermost sanctuaries of the desert, to roam alone on the shelterless sands of the burning waste, to be buried in the cave dug deeper and deeper under the wild mountains, or to mount on the pillar raised higher and higher towards the scorching sky.

Wild beasts met them there, not always tamed like those which fawned on St. Thecla—hunger, thirst, scorching heat; but all these to them were but as the weapons in the real strife, which was not with external nature, but with the wild beasts within, with those whom all fierce beasts and fiercer human passions symbolize—the wild beasts of the spiritual world, Satan and the fiery devils of hell.

And these Jerome had encountered in his own person. For him, it was said, the

dæmons had striven to pollute the sacred solitude by bringing before his vision, as in a theatre, troops of dancers and mimes, and all the wicked splendour and luxury of Rome. Moreover, before that spare, slight form, it was said, lions had crouched in submission, and devils had fled baffled.

And as we sate and listened I did not wonder. His words were like the flashing swords of armed legions as he denounced this Rome, this "Babylon, with its King Satan," the avarice of her clergy, the pagan luxury of those who had sworn themselves soldiers of Christ.

Around him sate the noble patrician women of the Aventine community, Paula, and her young daughters Blesilla and Eustochium, Marcella, the aged Asella, in their unimpeachable ascetic dress, and scattered around these the more worldly admirers,

apparently enjoying his denunciations of silks and fine linen, of braceleted hands and jewelled fingers, as much as if it had not been their own attire he was satirising.

His manner, with all its vehemence, had nevertheless a noble courtesy towards women. To Asella he spoke with tender deference, as to a mother; to Marcella with full concession of equality, as to a sister, pleased that she should not yield at once to his opinions as to mere authority, but should sift and search them, like the Bereans of old, until she was satisfied.

I remember well leaving the assembly with my aunt in a fascinated silence.

Many of the "Ecclesia Domestica," as Jerome called it, dispersed with us. I remember one of the most richly dressed women there saying to another, as they were assisted by slaves into their chariots—

"I dare not come hither again. This monk would persuade us all to the desert, as they say he did Melania twenty years ago."

"Does it affect you so?" was the reply. "Ah! you are free" (she meant widowed); "but my husband is a pagan, and would never consent to my doing anything extraordinary. Therefore, it is delicious to hear about it; better far than the Amphitheatre or the Hippodrome. His words rush along like the swiftest race-horses, and wrestle and fight with the fury of the finest athletes."

"But if *we* are the wild beasts he is fighting with?" was the reply.

"Ah, if you feel that, it is different."

I remember these words because I myself had felt rather as if I were one of the wild beasts he was fighting with.

Perpetual virginity, the strictest ascetic life,

the desert itself, seemed, while he spoke, the only true aim. And yet to me another destiny seemed marked out by my mother's words.

Her "*Good Shepherd—Both!*" the touch of her dying hand, had linked my life with my father's for ever, and bound me, I thought, to obey his will in all things, if he might only be thereby one day rescued from his Paganism, and we both might enter where she had gone before.

By a singular chance my father met us at the threshold as we returned from Marcella's palace. Something in my face, I suppose, surprised him, a pre-occupation, a conflict of expression, perhaps, which made him think I was passing the threshold of childhood, with its unquestioning simplicity.

"Where have you been, my little one?" he said, with a smile and an unwonted caress, as if to send me back to the childhood which

linked me with his happy past, and which he dreaded to see me leave.

"In Marcella's palace," I replied simply and fearlessly, "listening to the monk Jerome."

"Jerome!" he exclaimed, indignantly turning to Antonia, "did I not obtain from thee a sacred promise that thou wouldst not suffer this babe to entangle herself with vows?"

"She has made none, my brother," Antonia said, "to my knowledge. I cannot, indeed, control the soul."

"But this monk can!" he replied, "as thou well knowest. Can I forget the young patrician Melania, how, when her husband and her two children died, with tearless eyes, embracing the crucifix, she thanked God that all her ties to earth were severed, and then abandoned her only surviving child, an infant boy, to roam over the deserts of Egypt and Syria, neglecting her own flesh and blood to

nourish hordes of idle monks? Twenty years since! And the poor maddened creature is wandering still, they say, like Io, struck by the deadly eloquence of this Jerome! And to this thou wouldst expose this innocent child!"

The conversation was not carried further. But, a few mornings after, he came to me with a casket of jewels in his hand, and said—

"My Læta, see, I have brought thee jewels for a great festivity. This old palace is too solitary and grave for thee. I have promised to bring thee home one who will be a mother to thee. She has passed the follies and passions of youth, yet knows what youth is, and will brighten thine. She is a Christian, but no Melania: attired like other women of her rank, and not despising the graces of life. She will take thee to such festivities as befit

thy years. She says there are many such that none but these fanatical monks object to. I have suffered thy youth to be too sombre. We will remedy that mistake. It shall be so no more."

And he opened before me a casket containing a string of pearls, with delicate golden bracelets, and a necklace of Etruscan workmanship, and thought that he had left me cheered and pleased.

How could I make him know it was only himself I thirsted for, and that no persuasion of Jerome or any one else would ever lure me from his side, or from fulfilling my mother's prayer?

Diotima, the lady my father brought to our home as his wife, to introduce me into cheerful Christian society, was a Sicilian Greek; descended, she said, from the tyrants of Syracuse, connected also with some of the

new patricians, with whose pedigrees my father was wont to divert himself.

He sanguinely hoped by her help to wean me from the perilous eloquence of Jerome, and to introduce me to a safe and tepid Christianity.

It was not a successful experiment.

They had not well understood each other as to the intention of the alliance.

The point of agreement between them was, a detestation of Jerome and of the Aventine community.

Diotima had relations among the higher Roman clergy, who were at that time in a state of dull revolt against the Emperor Honorius, for prohibiting any of the Christian priesthood inheriting legacies; and in a flame of burning indignation with Jerome, for justifying this prohibition and denouncing the avarice of the clergy.

For sixteen years the holy and unworldly Damasus, bishop of our Imperial Rome, had been distracted by the false accusations and intrigues of this base section of the clergy.

From my childhood I had been taught to reverence the bishop; and loved the venerable care-worn face, and prized dearly the benediction of the holy hands lifted up for us and over us to heaven. Something of the sacredness of persecution as well as of priesthood was around him. A more blameless life could not well have been.

His father had been in office in the Church. He had been brought up on sacred ground, and from the first had laid all the treasures of a pure and studious youth at the feet of the Church.

It might have been thought that his mild rule would be all peace. But there was a

power in the pure heart and the frugal unworldly life, which the corrupt and avaricious dreaded. And from the first his election had been opposed.

A rival had been consecrated. The church of St. Agnes, dedicated to the memory of the martyred maiden whose very voice had scarcely died out of our hearing, was made an arena of fierce fight, besieged, set on fire, stained by Christian hands with Christian blood.

Damasus was pronounced the true bishop, but for years the schism went on, and false accusations of sins he was said to have committed in his youth, were brought against him in his old age.

At length the venerable bishop demanded to bring his cause before a council. Quite recently the council had pronounced these accusations groundless, and the Emperor had

sentenced his accusers to the punishment of false witnesses.

Still, the opposition and hatred did not cease. It had its root in reasons too real.

The life of Bishop Damasus was a standing accusation against the lives of those who assailed him.

He desired to see the Christian priesthood raised above the world, to serve the world.

His opponents desired to plunge it into the world, to rule the world.

The conflict had lately been enkindled afresh by the arrival of Jerome, whom Bishop Damasus greatly honoured.

The society, lay and clerical, which Diotima brought into our house were a race as unknown to me as the fabulous potentates from whom she traced her pedigree.

At that time the secular clergy did not

wear any distinctive garb, except when engaged in sacred functions.

Daintily dressed young deacons, in flowing silken robes like Orientals, with jewelled sandals, and perfumed like women, used, to my father's disgust, to mince through his halls; and portly priests, enriched, he said, by legacies of dotards and gifts of silly women, would alight at his threshold from their lofty chariots, and be feasted at Diotima's table.

How I hated the whole self-satisfied, self-seeking company!

Diotima had certainly, as my father said, outlived the passions of youth, if indeed she had ever experienced anything that could absorb egotism even for a time as a passion does. Cold, glittering, keen, false as her own narrow black-beaded eyes; the jewels and silks and chariots must, I thought,

have been her chief joys even at her first bridal.

It was not on such natures that the ascetic demands of Jerome told. For renunciation to become a passion, such as he made it to many, there must be passion to renounce. The women who gathered around him on the Aventine, fervent and self-sacrificing, if they had not been devoted to Christ, would have devoted themselves to some absorbing human love. Indeed many of them had.

Melania herself came to the Christ young and ardent, when her life had been laid waste in a few days by the death of the husband of her youth and of two of their children. The ties which had bound her to earth had been real ties. Otherwise she would not, when they were rent from her, have thrown herself with a new passion of grief at the foot of the crucifix, and thanked God for having severed

the bonds which kept her from Him. Even her abandonment of her only remaining babe was not, I think, from coldness of heart, but from the passionate recoil of affections which had ended in anguish.

And Paula, when her daughter, the beautiful young Blesilla, died, fainted with agony at her funeral; so that the heathen populace cried out against Jerome that he had murdered the daughter with fastings, and was murdering the mother with anguish.

Not from the lukewarm and the worldly, such as Diotima and her deacons, were the holy virgins and widows of the Aventine, or the Anchorets of the desert gathered; but from fervent hearts that must have glowed with some absorbing human love, if not with that of heaven.

The "cheerful Christian festivities" to which she was to introduce me, and which

my father thought would enliven my youth, did not interest me in the least.

Unless the pagan gaieties were more exciting than these, eloquence less fiery than Jerome's might, I thought, easily have attracted any one from them.

CHAPTER IV.

THE first of these "cheerful Christian festivities" I remember was an assembly at the festival of a martyr, in the country, near by father's villa on the mountains.

Diotima had a new robe for the occasion, splendid with gold and many-coloured embroidery, representing the passion of the martyr, whose name I forget.

These pictorial garments were then a new fashion in Rome.

Pagan ladies went about robed in pictures of Nymphs and Cupids, of lions and bears, or of the loves of Jupiter or Adonis; and

Diotima's admirers complimented her on having spoiled the Egyptians by translating those profane decorations into sacred stories from the Gospels or the martyrologies, and thus constituting herself a walking legend of the saints.

We were carried over the rough roads by relays of slaves, in our silken-curtained litters. There was a great tumult at the church, which was full of incense and lights and flowers, when the peasants gathered from various quarters to enjoy the feast, to adore the sacred relics, and to lay their votive offerings before them.

Tables were spread with wine and meats, as of old at the neighbouring Temple of Apollo.

The rejoicing was loud and excited.

Afterwards all crowded into the church; there was eager pushing to get near to view

the relics, and to return secure of the benediction and protection of the martyr.

I only remember a tumultuous crowd of feasters and sight-seers, and the shouts and self-gratulations of the procession as we returned past the deserted Temple of Apollo. As we passed it, we met my father, who came forward to greet us.

"Ten years since," said Diotima, improving the occasion, "the peasants gathered *here*. Hither were brought the incense and flowers and the sacrifices. Can any reasonable person doubt, now, on which side the victory lies?"

"Ay, the Emperor Julian was right," my father replied, "(if, indeed, he used the words), 'The Galilæan has conquered.' Has conquered," he added bitterly, "but conquered **WHAT?**"

And he turned away and retreated behind the shadow of one of the broken columns.

The sunset streamed in a crimson glory on the beautiful columns, and lit up a white statue of the sun-god which still stood within.

We were pausing for a few moments.

I saw my father go up to the Apollo, and, leaning against the sculptured pedestal, gaze mournfully up into the beautiful calm face.

An irresistible impulse seized me, of pity for him, and even for the beautiful fallen thing he would not abandon. No one was observing me. Diotima was too much occupied with her grandly-embroidered robes and her secular splendours. I crept out of the procession, and, hiding myself behind a wall till it had gone, went up to my father, and ventured to lay my hand on his arm.

He started and hid his face with a cry of pain.

"Child," he said, "is it only thou? I almost thought it was she herself."

Alas! would the time ever come when he would let me love him, and be to him not only as a fragment of the old lost love, but a new living love, a living voice from her we both loved, to gladden his age?

Then gently he added—

["Come away. This is no place for thee; no place *she* would have had thee be in. Thou, at least, art among the host of the conquerors. These abandoned shrines have no charms for thee."

"And for thee, O my father?" I dared to say.

"The solitude and the desertion, at least, have a charm," he replied. "If the crowds and the feasting had been here to-day, instead of at your martyr's tomb, perhaps I might not have cared to be here. Vulgar crowds and noise are not to my taste anywhere; but solitude and sadness any-

where are not for thee. I will take thee home."

But to be with him anywhere, anyhow, was delight for me. And long I remembered the silent walk in the sunset along the vineyard paths, with the shadowed plains stretched below, whilst from afar came the dim murmur of the sea.

And all the time his enigmatical words kept ringing in my mind—

"The Galilæan has conquered. But conquered WHAT?"

What did He come to conquer?

Battle and conquest were not the images most familiar to me.

The old endeared picture of the catacombs came back to me—the Good Shepherd with the kid.

All was plain there.

The Good Shepherd came to seek and to save.

To seek and to save what—whom?

The lost: men and women, and little children. To save their souls, themselves; to make them happy and good.

The saving and conquering must in some way mean the same.

He came, then, to conquer what?

The hearts of men. To make them, that is, His own; pure, holy, tender, loving, like His own.

Had he not done this?

On the Aventine, in the catacombs, in the homes in Rome, where the sick were nursed for love, and little orphan children cherished—surely, yes.

Among Diotima's society, hating the good bishop, railing against Jerome and the good women on the Aventine, loving themselves,

seeking not the lost sheep, but what the found sheep would be made to yield—gold, jewels, legacies, luxuries, rich robes; in everything, *themselves*, as surely, I thought, not.

How was I to make my father see the difference?

Surely our Lord himself could.

I could only love and pray.

But my detestation of this parody of Diotima's, which bewildered him, grew from day to day.

Happily for us all, it did not last long.

Diotima had not found my father so manageable as she expected. He gave her jewels and dresses, but declined to supply her with money for her clerical *clientela*.

And in a few months she began to have scruples at having married a pagan, which no penance, no absolution, could console her beneath; nothing, in short, except a divorce.

Divorces were easily obtained at Rome in those days, in spite of some laws of Constantine, which had been intended to make them difficult.

And Diotima was experienced in divorces. She might almost have been the lady with seventeen husbands whom Jerome said he had been summoned to bury.

Except that she would never have suffered herself to be buried by Jerome.

However, thanks to her scruples, or her absence of scruples, Diotima departed, unresisted, laden with all the jewels and dresses with which my father was only too glad to purchase her absence. So the old house was left to my father and me, and to Antonia in her cell in the upper chamber.

But the prohibition against frequenting the Aventine community was not removed from me. Jerome's eloquence continued to

be a terror to my father. Its results could not be hidden.

From time to time some young and beautiful Roman maiden, of the real old patrician blood, would abandon all the hopes of human life, and lay aside the splendours of her station, to wrap herself in the plain woollen robe, with the golden fillet of virginity, to consecrate herself to God. Or some lady, early widowed, like Marcella, endowed with the wealth of two noble houses, surrounded by suitors, tormented by pagan or worldly Christian relations to protect herself by a second marriage, would transform her palace into a hermitage, or, like Fabiola, devote her wealth to the poor she succoured.

This prohibition, and the contrast with Diotima, no doubt endeared to me the things Jerome, and my aunt, and the women in Marcella's palace loved.

Not being allowed to join these, and being free from Diotima, I spent much of my time during the few following months in the churches, and not a little in the chapels in the catacombs.

To one church especially, where the Psalms and new Latin hymns were sung in the new antiphonal music, introduced by Ambrose of Milan, I delighted to go, to sing and pray.

I used to think how the sweet martyred Agnes, and Perpetua, and Felicitas, rejoicing amidst their agonies, and Cæcilia, whose life was all holy song and joy till she also was called to the supreme joy of the supreme sacrifice, would have rejoiced to hear our Rome echo with these sacred strains. Nay, did they not hear them now? Often it seemed to me heavenly voices must be mingling with the music; so

solemn and so celestially glad it seemed, and made me.

And another joy, unutterably sweet, began to dawn on me. My father began to love to have me with him. He read with me old Greek poems and dramas, solemn and beautiful; and some of them, so nobly sad, they made me think, I know not why, of Jerome's eloquence, and the lives offered up to God on the Aventine.

And there were old Roman histories and legends — of the king who leapt into the chasm for Rome, and of noble men sacrificing all for Rome, or of women, as noble, sacrificing all for love of husband and children. And again these made me think of Marcella, and Paula, and Jerome, although Jerome said little indeed in praise of love of husband and children.

Yet I used to feel these noble men and

women of old Rome would have been with Bishop Damasus and Jerome had they lived in these days; not certainly with Diotima, or with the idle pagan populace who lived on the imperial bounty, or with the base and luxurious imperial officials who fed and courted them.

The noblest old pagan histories always seemed to me not heathen, but Christian, leading up to the fervent asceticism of the Aventine, and to the feet of the suffering, enduring, redeeming Christ.

And I remember being so moved with this conviction, that I could not help expressing it to my father.

We had been reading of Quintus Curtius leaping into the chasm, and of Regulus voluntarily dying in agonies amongst the nails, rather than surrender anything of the greatness of Rome. In spite of myself I said,

"Father, these would have been for Christ: these would have been with Jerome!"

For some minutes he said nothing; I feared he was displeased, and I feared infinitely more that I might have said something to turn him from Christianity. My face burned, and the tears came into my eyes. But as I glanced up, in his eyes there was no displeasure, only a perplexed and tender anxiety.

"My little Læta," he said, "you are becoming too much of a woman; you translate all the stories of the past into some passion of the present." But in a little time he murmured, "We must find something lighter and less mournful for thee. Go to thy dolls and thy doves."

But as I sate quietly beside him I heard him murmuring to himself—

"With Christ? Perhaps. With Jerome?"

Never. They were Roman citizens, they were fathers and husbands, and would never have decried marriage, and buried themselves from the Patria they served in caves and dens of the desert. The child thinks too much, and I only make her think more. We must find her companions."

And thereupon followed my father's second experiment at making the home more enlivening for me.

CHAPTER V.

NOT many weeks after the conversation with my father he brought home a young bride, to whom from the first I felt no dislike, but, on the contrary, an irresistible fascination, as indeed, to her misfortune and theirs, did nearly all who came near her.

Zosima, this young bride, had a rare rich beauty, which was but the expression of a rich and generous nature. Body and soul were in her more intertwined, more a unity in every way, than with most of us. From the first she took me to her heart, and I basked in the warmth of hers.

She was not many years older than I was, and full to the inmost core, and to the utmost fibre of her heart, of youth and exuberant life. It was the first youthful nature I had come near.

She had been married to my father by her relations, in the hope that he would guard her perilous beauty, and protect her from her own impulsive character.

They were wrong. Nothing but a right passion would have saved her from a wrong; a passion of devotion or of pure human love. Jerome might have saved her, or a great love in marriage. But nothing else. For she had not the shield even of the most external Christianity.

Her family were among the few ancient senatorial families who disdained to abandon the expiring Paganism. And she herself was pagan, with the wild gladness of the old

Paganism of beauty and youth, and passionate earthly joy and love.

My children, over her I would throw the tenderest veil; for she loved me, as I loved her, fondly; and at the last, thank God, thank God, not in vain.

My father she never loved with the passionate devotion which love meant for her.

She revered him, was grateful to him, grieved to have grieved him, was to the last glad he did not love her so that she could have grieved him more.

To her, Paganism meant life, and liberty, and joy; Christianity, in its reality among the disciples of Jerome, renunciation, restraint, and death; and in its parody amidst the party opposed to Jerome, a poor attempt to combine the safety of orthodoxy with a pale, dull reflection of the amusements of heathenism, the peril and the fire left out.

Through her a new current of the multitudinous life of Rome swept through our house.

To my father, Paganism meant a cynical philosophy touched tenderly with the sunset tints of a fallen religion.

To her it meant a worship, sanctioning and enkindling natural impulse; a ritual of tumultuous rejoicings; the wild festivities of the temples and the amphitheatre.

If a Christianity like my mother's could but have touched her life at its source, and purified without chilling, inspiring that living, fervent heart with the fervour of heavenly joy and love, consecrating all true human love and joy, what a full chalice, I have often thought, she might have brought to the altar of God!

Paganism, as I have said, was still standing, however undermined. On the Capitol

were the temples still crowned and peopled with the gods.

It was true that the statue of Victory had a few years before been ignominiously dragged from its pinnacle. But in a year or afterwards, in 389, it was restored with exulting processions. And in the same year in Egypt the great Serapion of Alexandria was assaulted with trembling, lest the gods might perchance still be mighty enough to defend it; the demolition only becoming a triumph when it was seen the colossal image of the god could be insulted with impunity.

But it gave altogether a new meaning to the Capitol and its temples to see that beautiful young bride going forth with a troop of slaves laden with garlands and gifts to offer sacrifices there.

The gods and goddesses which had been to me as antiquarian pictures, started into

Conquering.

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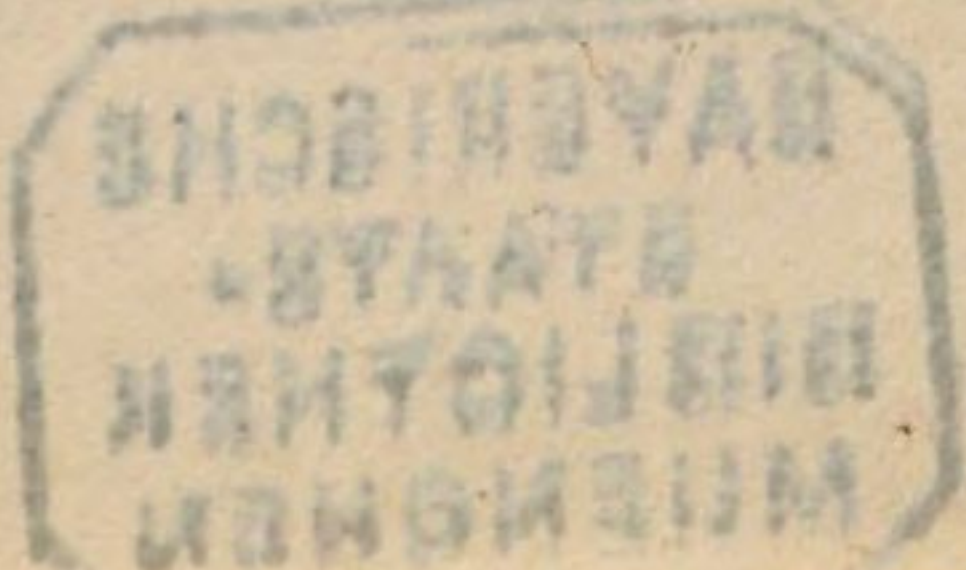


life under the kisses and lavish offerings of that joyous worshipper.

And meantime my aunt Antonia retired more strictly than ever into the recess of her cell, and was scarcely felt in what she deemed our desecrated house, except as the silent sense of a hidden presence agonizing in prayer and mortification for the overthrow of the enemy.

Antonia never spoke a word to Zosima. When by chance they met, she repelled her with stern loftiness and severe flashing eyes. To Antonia this beautiful, bewitching creature was as a serpent, fascinating and coiling in fatal folds around her nursling. The real attraction which strangely drew that passionate nature to the impassioned devotion of the Christian virgin, was to her merely one of her ten thousand false and perilous wiles.

When, loving both, as I could not help



doing, I ventured once to tell Antonia how Zosima warded off my father's anger at her own reception of her, and of all the reverent conciliatory words she had used, Antonia only vouchsafed me a pitying smile, and called me a poor, innocent, deluded victim.

My situation was indeed more perilous than I knew; perilous because Zosima's spells were no intentional wiles, but the inevitable fascination of her joyous, brilliant, ardent nature.

Looking back, I see I was indeed innocently treading on the brink of an abyss. For the wickedness of Rome in those days was an abyss, a seething cauldron of abominations, where pleasure and torture, cruelty, and all luxurious vices fed and consumed each other in a fiery horror which I am sure God the All Merciful will never suffer to exist permanently in hell, or anywhere else.

Poor foolish lamb that I was! Always that tender image of the kid on the shepherd's shoulders was in my heart. And with my love and gentle pleading I hoped to win her to better joy and higher life. Until on one fatal day the fond delusion ended.

Always with that vain hope of shielding her, blended with the delight of being beside her, I went with her to the amphitheatre, where there was to be a great exhibition of the gladiatorial games. The senators were there in state, the vestal virgins, still recognised; and there were gathered all the idle, dissolute multitudes of Rome, still fed and amused, and provided with luxuries, baths, and endless games, at the expense of the emperor, or rather of the oppressed provinces.

It was an overpowering sight to see the Coliseum crowded from the arena to the

topmost range of the stone seats; eighty thousand spectators, one "great cloud of witnesses"—one terrible storm-cloud gathering its lightnings around the conflict in the centre.

Never have there been dramas like those. These were no fictitious combats, no feigned tortures, no counterfeited death.

All was terribly true.

Those tens of thousands—senators, young nobles, and patrician women, mingled with the dregs of that most corrupt populace—were there for a spectacle which delighted them all equally, the combats which were certain to end for the majority of the combatants in torture and death. The more the slaughter the greater the excitement.

On this particular occasion it was no criminal reserved for this mode of death as an alternative of some other execution. The

combatants were chiefly Gothic captives fresh from a recent imperial victory in the North. They were to fight with wild beasts, which had been brought in great numbers from the African coast, and with gladiators by profession.

There was no denying the fearful excitement of the spectacle. The hush of expectation among the eighty thousand, holding their breath in suspense until the gates were opened, was as overpowering as the shout which broke it, echoing to the other end of Rome. Some of the professional gladiators, known to the crowd, were hailed with tumultuous applause by their friends. These were said to be eager for the fray.

But those captive strangers of the fair races of the North—never shall I forget the hopeless appeal in some of their countenances, frank and fair, as they looked up to

the pitiless masses of gazers which encircled them, for whose amusement they were to spend their last strength and courage, tearing each other, and being torn to pieces!

But ah! my children, it is not, after all, those Goths that have been torn to pieces, but that cruel Rome herself.

There was no unmanly flinching from the combat. At first, I well remember the terrible fascination which riveted my eyes to it. There was a chance in each individual case of escape; and for a little while I watched one and another in the desperate struggle for life, in the trembling hope that each one I watched might conquer and escape.

But as one and another fell mangled and helpless on the sand, and more and more terribly clear it became that the purpose was not escape, but slaughter, the end expected and desired by this great, pitiless

mass of spectators, not life, but torture and death; as fall after fall was met, not with cries of pity, but with yells of triumph from the crowds around me, an unutterable horror seized me, as if I had fallen among a company of demons.

I turned instinctively to Zosima—so joyous, so generous, so affectionate always to me—for a glance of sympathy.

Never shall I forget the transformation of her face. Her cheeks were flushed, her eyes flashed with a fierce and cruel fire, her breast panted. She looked like one of those beautiful, terrible tigresses in the arena below, ready to spring on her prey.

At that moment one of the Gothic captives, who had made a brave and desperate fight, lay prostrate, bleeding and exhausted on the sand, and it was at the choice of the crowd whether he should die or live.

To my horror I saw her join the rest in giving the fatal signal for his death. A dagger was plunged into the helpless form, and with one more writhe of anguish he died.

I saw no more of the combat in the arena that day.

A yet more real and terrible conflict seemed going on around me, as I watched the faces growing fiercer and fiercer, and heard the cruel shouts and yells.

The devils, it seemed to me, were visibly loose and raging around me, as visible and audible as in any of the combats and temptations of Anthony in the desert, contending for the possession of all this Roman multitude, and winning it; winning those human hearts to every cruel and diabolical passion; contending also for the possession of the generous heart beside me, and win-

ning—having already won it, revelling in their conquest, and filling those beautiful eyes with infernal fire.

Dreadful old legends came back to me. I thought of the fair, false, ghostly women,—Lamias, who could win and return human love, and yet whose love was death to what it loved.

My love to her seemed to undergo something of the same dreadful transformation. It could not cease, yet it was mingled with loathing.

I felt she could never be the same to me as before.

And as, with the double fascination of the old affection and the new horror, I gazed on her, I became sensible that other eyes than mine, those of a young patrician I had seen at our house, were watching her as intently, until their in-

tense gaze seemed to fascinate her own towards them, and soon I could not but see that for those two the arena with its combats, the spectators with their shouts of triumph or derision, ceased to be, and they alone were present to each other, all beside becoming misty and far off, and indifferent as a half-forgotten dream.

I was startled from my spell-bound gaze on Zosima by the final cry of that great multitude, when at last two men, clad symbolically as Mercury and Pluto, stepped forth on the bloody arena, one armed with a red-hot iron, to test if any of the victims still lived, and the other with an axe, to give the death-blow.

For the gladiatorial games were originally sacred funereal rites, human sacrifices to the dead.

And so the terrible combat ended. And so, alas, my fond delusion vanished, my hope of gently winning that joyous, beautiful creature to the Source of all true joy and beauty. I had thought myself gently drawing a creature like myself, whilst I had been unconsciously contending with passions cruel, real, and terrible as volcanic fires, or murderous lightning, or the billows and storms of the great sea, on whose shore I was playing as a little child. I had been striving to quench Vesuvius with the spray of a garden-fountain, or to brave Euroclydon in a toy boat with silken sails.

Once more she came to me, after we reached home that day.

I was resting that evening, with closed eyes, on my couch, the couch in my own mother's room, trying with quivering, closely-

shut eyelids to press out the frightful horrors of the Coliseum, when I heard her light step on the threshold.

I did not stir nor raise my eyes. I dreaded to see her.

And when she came close to me, and I felt her breath on my cheek, and then a soft kiss on my eyelids, I could not bear to look up at her. Through whatever tender light there might be in her eyes for me, I thought I should see undimmed the cruel fire I had seen that day. And I did not dare to encounter it.

So, in another minute, with a long sigh and a murmured caressing word, the light step withdrew, and passed away across the threshold.

Had I known it was for the last time, had I known whither her steps were bent, I would have looked up, I would have risen,

thrown my arms around her, clasped her to my heart, made any struggle to keep her still beside us!

But I only thought, "To-morrow I shall have forgotten the terrible transformation. The loathly Lamia will have vanished like an evil dream, and the beautiful, kind, brilliant eyes will shine on me again."

But on the morrow Zosima herself had vanished, and never did I see her more until after long years, when the beauty and the fascination were lost for ever, and the life was lost, and all was lost but what only One can save.

After that my father made no more matrimonial experiments on his own behalf; and by a natural revulsion of feeling he silently withdrew any prohibitions against Christian restraints of any kind, and left me and Antonia free to frequent

Marcella's palace as much as we liked. He acknowledged that there were spells more fatal than those of Jerome's eloquence.

CHAPTER VI.

THE evening after Zosima's flight I took refuge in Antonia's chamber. How tender her austerity seemed to me, how beautiful the bareness of her cell of prayer, compared with the cruel passion and putrifying luxury of that hideous world of the streets and the Coliseum!

That night I would have made any vow which might raise a barrier between me and that tremendous abyss, but for the fact that two whom I had loved dearly—one, my father, whom I loved more than my life—still lingered within it.

The Good Shepherd bearing home the lost, the "Both," were still deepest in my heart. But everything seemed to have become deepened and intensified by that glimpse into the unfathomable depth of the ruin from which the lost had to be rescued, and the gigantic force of the flood which swept them away. Before, all had seemed to me so smooth and sweet and easy! So much beauty and joy even in the old religion, so much good in all, that the only unaccountable marvel was that all did not at once leave the lesser beauty for the greater, the good for the perfect! The Good Shepherd's voice so tender, his call so clear, the shelter of his arms so sweet—why, how could it be that these straying and forlorn ones of his flock did not all, at once, creep or rush back to his side? I had thought of His seeking but as of a patient search

and a tender pleading;—of their being lost but as of a wild and wilful straying of careless creatures who had missed their way.

But now quite other meanings came to me out of the familiar parable.

The being lost meant the cruel Coliseum, the transformation of the fairest and brightest human creatures into the likeness of the wild beasts there maddened to the slaughter; it meant the sweeping away of home and purity, and all sacred things, by terrible gusts of passion.

To save, then, meant something more than to call with a voice sweeter than that of Orpheus, or even to follow with patient, unwearied steps, and bring them home on the tender heart. It meant—ah! it meant—to die.

“The good Shepherd layeth down his life for the sheep.”

So, by nothing easier, He sought us; so by nothing less, He saved us.

By a love as real as the passions He came to rescue us from, and divinely stronger.

By an anguish as terrible as the miseries to which those passions lead.

I began to understand why the Church has adopted the cross as her central symbol, more central than even that of the Good Shepherd.

My mother, St. Agnes, all the blessed saints, were Orantes, interceding ones, with arms imploringly outstretched, to receive blessings, lovingly outstretched to shed them forth.

His hands were stretched out, bleeding and mangled, on the cross. The whole Church could intercede by offering up prayer; He had interposed by offering up Himself.

Every one of us could and must take up some portion of the world's burdens. He had borne the whole, had been crushed beneath the burden, had died, had redeemed, was able to save to the uttermost.

I grew to understand, and I grew to hope. Deep as was the disease—deep beyond what I had dreamed possible—the remedy went deeper.

It was the Good Shepherd still, at the heart of all my hope, of all my life.

It was the Good Shepherd rejoicing in the thought of His eternal youth, and in His unmeasurable power to bless and save.

But it was the Good Shepherd rejoicing because He had drained to the depths for us the cup of unutterable sorrow. It was the Good Shepherd seeking, finding, saving, because He had refused to save Himself.

Jerome was by nature a combatant, per-

haps also by grace. Righteous anger was at the heart of much of his fiery eloquence. The first fury of his combative character had been spent on himself. In the desert he had fought himself nigh unto blood; had raged and contended against himself until he fell into an all but mortal illness. Against *himself*, not only against what would commonly be called sin, but against his very nature, the root and soil from which sin might spring; against his love of beauty, of good Latin, of human praise and affection; against his own innermost self. The lion might indeed come to his cave and crouch tamed at his feet; but who would tame the lion Jerome? It was in this inward combat that he had sharpened the weapons which afterwards he wielded against so many foes in the one long controversy of his most militant life.

But to me this was more comprehensible than formerly it had been.

Until now, I had thought a mild conciliation of all the best in everything possible; but I began to feel that the worst in everything was too closely intertwined with the best to render this probable. I began to feel that perhaps the best in all religions could only be dissevered from the worst by blows which battered the worst to destruction.

The worst in the pagan world, in Rome, and, alas! also in the Church, seemed at that time so hopelessly and irremediably bad!

Religious communities, my children, of all kinds are for ever running to seed in Pharisaic formalities and externalisms. Base, middle-aged vices, covetousness, ease, vanity, are for ever creeping in, cold and slow, to

fill up the void of the ebbing flood of passion. I had learned in these last years the existence of the world, the flesh, and the devil; and Jerome's stinging satires, as well as his fiery denunciations, had a new meaning for me.

These "priests, in chariots drawn by the finest horses in Rome, flattering rich women, and haunting the death-beds of wealthy dotards; expectant of legacies;" these "young deacons, their hair frizzed with curling-irons like actors, in perfumed silken robes, their fingers glittering with rings, mincing along the marble halls on the tips of their toes in delicate shoes," "pointedly admiring costly cushions and embroidered towels till they are presented to them," "exhibiting their effeminate graces in the palaces, and departing with hands full of gold;" these deaconesses, with "hair cropped

like boys and dresses half-masculine" (the effeminate affectation of the men balanced by the masculine affectation of the women); these ladies, clothed in gold tissues, embroidered with gospel-histories, "their eyelids coloured black and their cheeks crimson, plastering their faces to hide the wrinkles till they looked like idols, powdering their grey hair with gold, and behaving before their grandchildren like timid girls;"—I had seen them, I had abhorred them as much as Jerome, according to the measure of my capacity for abhorrence in comparison with his.

His satire and his indignant denunciations, like those of our blessed Lord himself, were directed far more against the religious world, the worldly religious, the Pharisees, than against the pagan world; that is, they were directed against *those who could hear* (a sound rule, my children, as to all denuncia-

tions). The religious world did hear, and revenged itself by low murmurs of calumny, and finally by loud retorts which drove him from Rome.

But at the moment when Marcella's Palace and Oratory were permitted to me again, the *Ecclesia Domestica*, of which Jerome was the guide, was in full bloom.

For a moment, before Rome fell beneath the barbarians, it seemed as if all the old Roman virtue, the lofty purity of her patrician women, the stoical self-sacrifice of her patriots, blossomed into perfection among that little Christian community on the Aventine.

All have passed beyond man's judgment now; some by rough and terrible ways. But such a band of noble women, for patrician grace and beauty, for large-hearted generosity to others, for austerity to themselves, for

study and prayer and works of mercy, for steadfast pursuit of all high purposes, I never hope to see gathered together again. Let me recall a few of the revered names.

And, first of all, Marcella, who had given herself to God in the enthusiasm of her youth, and the brilliancy of a beauty said to surpass all then in Rome; moved forty years before, when only seven years of age, by the presence and eloquence of the exiled Athanasius; constant to the vocation of her early widowhood, conquering by her steadfastness and devotion the opposition of her mother, and the calumny of her kindred; herself the possessor of the great Palace which was the gathering-place of the community, she was in a sense its queen. Beside her were Furia, grand-daughter of Camillus; the austere Asela, whom Jerome called mother, as he called Marcella sister; and Sophronia,

These had long been tested, and had reached or passed middle age.

There were others, young matrons, young maidens; and among these Fabiola, of the ancient Fabian House—(a little suspected among the austere community, and not without reason, seeing she had twice married in passionate wilfulness, had found both her husbands intolerably vicious, and had divorced both)—had, nevertheless, always a strong attraction for many, and for me. Ardent, impetuous, disinterested, all the noble things in her which made us love her, found at last their true aim. Beneficent work of all kinds grew out of the devotion of the Aventine community: liberation of slaves, refuges for pilgrims and for the sick, and orphan homes; but the nursing and tending in all these had hitherto been done by proxy. Fabiola was the first who, after

her voluntary public penitence, devoted, not only her substance, but herself to the sick and poor; tending them with her own hands, even in the most loathsome diseases. Ah, my children, it is not the first time that the alabaster box of most precious ointment has come from such hands, nor the last time it will be accepted!

There were also two young maidens known to me, of my own age, belonging to the *Ecclesia Domestica*; Principia, adopted daughter of Marcella, who afterwards ministered to her adopted mother dying of cruel treatment in the sack of Rome; and Eustochium, daughter of Paula, vowed to virginity from her earliest youth. But it was Paula herself who gradually and unconsciously became the centre of the whole community.

Beauty, fervour of character, the noblest birth, and unbounded wealth were hers;

with an intellect clear, just and graceful, as befitted her Greek descent, and a character, naturally tender and passionate, yet capable, as she afterwards proved, of the noblest Roman stoicism — every kind of distinction was concentrated in her.

Among her Greek ancestry were numbered the royal houses of Mycenæ and Lacedæmon; in her Roman pedigree were the Scipios and the Gracchi. She had married a Greek said to be descended from Eneas, who remained faithful to the worship of the Olympian gods.

When Jerome came from the East to Marcella's Palace, Paula was in the early grief of her widowhood; for a time, her sorrow had imperilled her life.

She had five daughters and one son.

On the subject of these daughters raged the fiercest controversies between Jerome,

the Pagan world, and the worldly Christians.

Eustochium gave the first occasion. She incensed her patrician pagan kindred by assuming the dark veil and golden fillet of the Christian virgin.

Trained by Marcella from infancy, her character, naturally of the firm, strong, ancient Roman mould, had been fortified by early discipline.

Paula had grown up in Asiatic luxury; carried everywhere in chariots or dainty litters, her feet had scarcely touched the streets of Rome; and the greater portion of her time, day and night, had been spent reclining on soft couches.

Eustochium had grown up in the austere chamber of Marcella; the one great passion of her life was her love for her mother, and with this and their common friendship for

Jerome her religious life was interwined; the ordinary temptations of youth she did not seem so much to renounce as to despise.

On one especial day, which I well remember, her pagan kindred insisted on trying to win her to the world, by showing her what she could be to it and it to her. They arrayed her elaborately with all the splendour that belonged to her station, setting free the long dark tresses hidden under the virgin's veil, displaying them in all their luxuriance, and gathering part of them into towering erections which were thought becoming; the brilliancy of her eyes they enhanced by darkening her eyelids and crimsoning her cheeks, and then, lavishing flatteries on her, they implored her not to rob them and the world of beauty so fresh and brilliant.

At evening, she quietly resumed her dark

woollen dress, and returned unchanged to the Aventine community. The Domestic Church greatly rejoiced and triumphed; but to Eustochium it seemed that she had simply done what was natural and inevitable.

Blesilla resembled Paula more than Eustochium in character; although, perhaps more in the softness than in the ardour of her mother's nature. When first I knew her, she had by no means abandoned the love of luxury or ease or pomp.

She had been lately widowed, after a few months of married life. She refused all proposals of a second marriage; but more, it was said, from love of liberty than of the lost husband. She spent most of her time before the mirror, and delighted in the most elaborate toilettes, until she was smitten with severe illness.

Then, in one of the feverish nights of

sickness, she seemed to hear the Divine Voice saying to her, as of old to Lazarus "*Rise and come forth.*"

She did arise very soon, cured, as it seemed, of her sickness; and she came forth for ever from the world. Henceforth she wore dark woollen garments, and sold her silks and jewels and gave the money to the poor.

To the perfect Greek and Latin, naturally spoken in her family as its double mother-tongue, she added the study of Hebrew; and was soon able to delight her mother and sister by chanting the Psalms with them in the very words of David.

What with psalms and hymns, ardent study of the Holy Scriptures in the original languages, eager discourse, and benevolent work, time flew swiftly in the Aventine Palace. And, moreover, we had news from

all parts of the world of the progress of the Christian life, and of ascetic devotion; of monks, like the holy Martin of Tours, making destructive tours among the idols in Gaul; of anchorets transferring the devotion of the Thebaid to the Apennines; of the conversion of heretics and pagans, and worldly Christians everywhere.

Besides, there were always the adventures of Melania to be discussed, that impetuous Spaniard who never seemed to grow old, redoubtable to the lukewarm, and carrying into her piety the enterprise of a female Hercules. She visited the monasteries of Egypt, and even enlivened the austere anchorets of Nitrai by her vivacious presence, leaving with them alms worthy of an empress. During a persecution she once fed five thousand monks for some days. She found refuges for the persecuted and hid

them; she accompanied them to the tribunals. She visited the prisons of the orthodox in Syria in the disguise of a slave; and at one time delivered herself from prison by overwhelming the governor with the magnificence of her rank, and of her consular and pretorian connections. "For see," she said to her friends, "a great name is worth something; we can set it on any animal that tries to hurt us like a falcon or a dog."

At that time no one seemed to think there was any pride or self-will in these things. The son she had abandoned, fortunately grew up a Christian. Jerome called her a saint, and compared her to St. Thecla. It was not till her impetuosity had been turned against him that he expunged her name and eulogies from his writings. In the meantime Melania and the various noble pilgrims, male and female, to the sacred places in the East, sup-

plied the Aventine with countless records of adventure in their letters.

Dulness and monotony had no place there. Amidst the languor, and decay, and hollowness of Rome, Christian and pagan, it was a centre of intense and varied life.

The peace and prosperity did not, however, last long unbroken. The conversion of Blesilla, and the refusal of both Blesilla and Eustochium to marry, incensed many of the noblest families in Rome, who had desired alliance with the family of Paula; and their indignation was greatly aggravated by Jerome's letter to Eustochium on the glories and merits of celibacy, full of sarcastic portraits too vivid and too true not to be applied, and flinging fiery darts of satire on every side—on the luxurious clergy and self-indulgent patrician women, on the legacy-hunters, on the false virgins, on the false

priests, and on pretenders of all kinds. They retaliated by saying Jerome had spoken contemptuously of marriage. "By no means," was his not altogether conciliatory retort; "he honoured marriage, since without it there could be no monks!"

Two things brought this indignation to a climax, the death of Blesilla and of the Bishop Damasus.

Blesilla had a relapse, after her recovery. The brief flicker of revived life which she had devoted to religion was quenched again. No miraculous voice came this time to detain her from the heaven grown so dear to her; and humble and penitent, but fearless, she passed away.

"Pray to the Lord Jesus that He pardon me," were her dying words, "because I have not been able to carry out what I had resolved."

The body she had attenuated, her indignant pagan kindred said, with fasting and clothed in rude garments, was wrapped by them in golden tissues, and followed with all the ancient pomp of her house to the tomb.

Paula's passionate maternal heart was all but broken. She attempted neither to moderate nor to conceal her grief.

All Rome was at the obsequies of this daughter of the Scipios. All Rome beheld them interrupted by the anguish of the mother. Paula seemed mad with grief; she wailed and sobbed, and at last fainted away.

"See," the people said, "what this monk Jerome has done! They have forced this miserable matron to become a nun; and lo! in her agony she bewails her children, and sorrows as never pagan mother sorrowed."

The indignation of the populace placed Jerome's life in danger.

But out of this agony grew the great enduring friendship of his and Paula's life.

For days she would take no nourishment. In vain the poor feeble hands made the sign of the cross on her breast. To this cross she could not bow.

She consented to see Jerome, because Jerome had known and honoured her child; but the very sight of him seemed only to recall her joy and deepen her grief.

At length he wrote her a letter, which at last recalled her to herself.

"What am I doing?" he wrote. "I would stop the tears of a mother; and lo! I weep. But what? did not Jesus weep for Lazarus, because He loved him?"

"He is no good comforter who stifles his own groans—who does not know how to weep and to speak at once; whose heart does not bleed with the sorrows he would console.

“Yes, Paula, I call to witness Jesus, whose steps she followed—the angels, whose companion she now is, that I, her spiritual father, also suffer torments, and could sometimes say, ‘Cursed be the day that I was born.’

“Thinkest thou that I do not feel the waves of revolt surge also sometimes in my heart? that I also do not ask why impious grey-beards enjoy the good things of the world, whilst innocent youth and sinless infancy are cut off in the bloom? why leprosy is suffered, or the convulsions of epilepsy? why the impious, the adulterous, the homicide, the sacrilegious live on in our sight and blaspheme God?

“These thoughts assail me, but I repel them with horror, and cry trembling, ‘Oh, depths of the wisdom of God, and ways past finding out!’ And if I weep now, it is not for her, but for ourselves, who have lost her.

“Take care, Paula, lest the Saviour should say to thee, ‘Wherefore art thou angry? Because thy child has become mine? Thou refusest food not from love of fasting, but of grief. This abstinence, I disown it; these fasts, I reject them; they are grievous to me. I receive not into my bosom a soul which, in spite of me, has severed itself from the body. Leave these senseless self-tortures to a proud philosophy, to Zeno, to Cleombrotus, to Cato. My Spirit descends on the humble and peaceful, not on those who rebel. Thou hast promised me obedience; when taking the religious garb thou didst separate thyself from other matrons. To weep as thou dost—to make thyself thus desolate, belongs to robes of silk. My Apostle says, ‘Sorrow not as the world.’”

He said she dishonoured the Church by this uncontrolled sorrow; he said that she

was abandoning her child Eustochium to orphanhood. "Seest thou not, Paula, that these cries of hatred from the Pagans grieve Christ as they rejoice Satan? These tears are bringing thee to the threshold of the grave; they are detestable; they are full of sacrilege and of unbelief. Thou utterest piercing cries as if flames were burning thee alive. Thou art murdering thyself. But at thy cries the merciful Jesus draws near to thee, and says, 'Why weepest thou? Thy young daughter is not dead. She sleepeth.' Thou writhest in despair on the sepulchre of thy child; but look up, the angel is there rebuking thee, and saying, 'Seek not the living among the dead.'"

Paula listened and submitted—arose and lived. And then commenced that pure and intense friendship which made the chief joy and interest thenceforth of her life and

of Jerome's, and which aroused for a time the envy and calumny of Rome.

Soon after this came the death of the good old Bishop Damasus, who had always revered Jerome, and had desired the reform of abuses as earnestly as he did. Siricius, his successor, yielding to the clamour of the opposite party, withdrew from Jerome the secretaryship of the Pontifical Chancery.

The calumnies about Paula and the Aventine community were redoubled. At length, happily for Jerome, these became so definite that one of the false accusers was brought before the magistrates, and under the torture confessed that he had spoken falsely.

The end of the accusers was nevertheless gained. Jerome's position in Rome had become intolerable; suspicion had been thrown on the Ecclesia Domestica, and to remove this he departed from Rome, "that

Roman Babylon," as he named her, "the woman clothed in purple and scarlet of the Apocalypse."

Jerome returned once more to the East. But to Paula, also, Rome, which had calumniated and rejected him, became unendurable.

A few months after Jerome's departure, Paula and Eustochium, with a band of consecrated maidens, sailed to rejoin him in Palestine.

Well do I remember the embarkation at Ostia, when Paula and Eustochium, with the veiled band of young maidens, stood on the vessel, whilst on the shore they were leaving, her young son Toxotius stretched out his arms to his mother, and her young daughter Rufina stood sad and still, orphaned a second time.

I remember it especially, because to me

that day was the beginning of a new era of life, which seemed at the time a closing of much precious hope which had begun to dawn on me for my father.

The primitive simplicity of life, the self-denial, and the beneficence of the Aventine community had deeply moved him. More than once he had said—

“All else seems death, but on the Aventine is life. All else is luxury and corruption, fierce or licentious pleasure; Asiatic voluptuousness, barbaric pomp, barbarous amusements. *There* is a remnant of old Rome—her nobleness, her austerity, her strength. And,” he once added, “sometimes I think there is also something there more than old Rome ever knew—a tender pity for suffering, a sympathy for all humanity that is rooted deeper and spreads wider than anything Rome ever recognised.

To me the old Roman married life seems better and sweeter than this unnatural celibacy. Yet it is strange!" he concluded, "their words, as far as I hear them, seem much as if their ideal of virtue were simply not to marry. But their lives are full of goodness of a far wider type, of beneficence, and zealous work, and hope, and generous kindness. There must be some great reality underneath the rule they think they live by! And sometimes I think this can be nothing but that Life your mother spoke of, whose footsteps are drawing the world to the Cross and the Cradle in Palestine."

My heart was thus beginning to glow with hope of his conversion, when this departure of Paula seemed to throw him back again.

"It is only Melania and her madness over again!" he said contemptuously. "Child, it would never do to have thee wandering

over the world after this mad monk. It is time we thought of a truer and sweeter life for thee."

To me the controversy about the relative merits of celibacy and marriage had never come personally home.

Whatever might be the vocation of Eustochium and Blesilla, to me my vocation had come irrevocably from the dying lips of my mother.

Before all things, I had to bring my father home to the sacred fold, to the sacred feet. If burying myself in the most solitary tomb in Egypt would do this, that was my vocation. If my marriage would help him, marriage was my vocation. But always the end was the same. The heart has not room for more than one absorbing affection and purpose, and mine was that.

So it came about that I was married to

the young Gothic soldier, Theodoric, a new Christian, converted to the orthodox faith by witnessing the penitence of the great Theodosius, a few years before, on the threshold of the Basilica of Ambrose at Milan.

My children, my experience has been perhaps singular. I give it to you as a history I cannot change; by no means as a pattern. Others have said much about the sin of creature-worship, and their idolatry in loving too much.

The sin I have to mourn over is loving too little, and waking to see the worth of what I should have prized so dearly, only too late.

It was not till I saw the eyes that had watched over me so tenderly closed in death, that I felt what I had lost in my husband.

My children, marriage may be less holy

than celibacy, but the love of married life, to be according to God's will, should, I am sure, be absorbing and supreme, beyond that of parents or of children; first and deepest, that it may be a type of the first and deepest.

CHAPTER VII.

I MARRIED in obedience to my father's command, thankful that his choice for me had fallen on a Christian; and to my husband I rendered all loyalty and duty.

But he gave me infinitely more. And looking back, beside his bier, I felt how his heart had thirsted for more. And, from that day to this, the thought has cost me the bitterest tears I ever shed.

Simple he was, and loyal and true, with nothing of Greek acuteness and subtlety, or of the old Roman severity about him, and nothing of the new Roman cynicism or

scepticism; affectionate and just, loving good, and abhorring evil.

The sight that won him to Christ was that great triumph of mercy over power, manifested in the public penitence of the Emperor.

"The Emperor of the world," he said, "lay prostrate on the threshold before the closed doors of the Basilica, sprinkled with ashes.

"Around him were gathered his legions, who would have demolished the Basilica at a word from him.

"Around him were gathered thousands of his subjects witnessing his humiliation, all of whom his word could have sentenced to banishment or death.

"What was the crime which humiliated him?

"What was the power which thus subdued the lord of the world?

"The crime was an unmerciful act; the slaughter of thousands of the citizens of Thessalonica in arbitrary revenge for a sedition.

"The power was invisible; mighty to move the Emperor's will, as the Emperor's will was to rule the world.

"Ambrose was but one witness of this Unseen Power: the Emperor's conscience was the other.

"Mightiest of all, I thought, must be this Unseen Power; mightiest, and most merciful.

"I determined to learn more of it; this power that will not suffer injustice.

"I came to be taught in the Basilica, whose Bishop's word made it a fortress impregnable to the Emperor.

"And there I learned that this Unseen Just One had become incarnate, seen of

men's eyes, handled—ah, how cruelly!—by men's hands, dying the slave's death for the world enslaved to sin; and now reigning over the world, to make it free. And then he deigned in holy baptism to make me His servant, and so to make me free; and I remain His servant and His freedman for ever."

The faith and character of my Theodoric had a steady and growing influence on my father.

His character, transparent and frank as his blue Saxon eyes; his intellect, straightforward, direct, and decisive as their firm and open glance, told forcibly on my father's subtle sense of the defects and merits of all systems of belief, which made religious decisions so difficult to him. All the more, because Theodoric never discussed, or attempted to comprehend or convince him.

He, a Goth, new to civilisation, new to

Christianity, never dreamed of debating, or even of endeavouring to sympathize, with a mind which he deemed a depository of the wisdom of all the ages.

"You Romans," he would say, "have been thinking for a thousand years. We Goths are men, indeed, in battle, but children in thinking. We only began to think yesterday, and to-morrow we have to fight again for the nations who, by virtue of thinking, have grown feeble in fighting.

"The Almighty, who no doubt foresaw there would be Goths, mercifully sent us not a religion, but His Son; not a philosophy, but a Life; not reasonings about immortality, but One who died and rose again; not a sage, but a King. And for us who can obey, and command, and fight, but have so little time to think, Christianity is no doubt easier than for you."

For Antonia and the Ecclesia Domestica Theodoric had the deepest respect. They reminded him of the sacred prophetesses and virgins of his own people.

His manner to them—indeed, to all women—was touched with a tender protective reverence, which made the elaborate compliments of the society of Rome seem as vulgar as they were hollow.

Antonia, from the beginning, loved him with a motherly pride, which seemed to bring out new capacities in her character.

The Aventine community was now our resort more frequently than ever.

The loss of Jerome and Paula drew those who remained more closely together. And from time to time came letters from the absent friends, which, if less full of stirring adventure than Melania's had been, breathed far more of devotion and imaginative reverence.

We heard of Paula at the Holy Sepulchre, imprinting fervent kisses on the sacred stones, and touching all Jerusalem by her tears; at Bethlehem, weeping, smiling, and praying all at once, as she exclaimed, "Hail, Bethlehem, house of bread, for here was born the true Bread of Life."

On Calvary, the fragments of the true Cross, discovered by the Empress Helena, seemed to vanish from her enraptured gaze, and in its place she beheld the Cross itself, and on it the Lord Himself.

At Bethlehem, prostrate on the stone in the cave of the manger, she seemed to see the Babe wrapped in swaddling-clothes in the arms of the Virgin-mother, and the shepherds coming to adore Him in the night.

The heroic histories and tender domestic stories of the Old Covenant also were full of interest to those pilgrims; the battle-

fields of Esdraelon, the tomb of Rachel the beloved.

We scarcely recognised our delicate Paula in those arduous journeyings; she who, with all her mental energy, had seemed equal to no bodily fatigue, reclining languidly on her couch, borne through the streets in silken-curtained litters, or in luxurious chariots, now rode long journeys on an ass, or even walked for hours across the rocky mountain-paths of Palestine. Her very physical frame seemed renewed, as in a fountain of youth, by approaching the birthplace of the new life of the world.

At Sychar she stood by the well where the Saviour had sate, weary, and had taught the Samaritan. At Sebaste she burst into tears at the sight of the dreary company of the demoniacs "howling like wolves, roaring like bulls, convulsed, writhing, uttering in-

articulate cries of anguish," around the tomb of John the Baptist. At Nazareth, her heart was calmed by the peace of that fertile valley, "foster-mother of Christ;" and great joy it was to her to cross Gennesareth, that lake hallowed by having been sailed on by Jesus.

Eustochium, her devoted daughter, and the band of Roman virgins, went with her. Jerome protected the little company. To him these journeys were part of the preparation for his great work of translating and commenting on the Holy Scriptures, to which Paula and the Ecclesia Domestica, constantly encouraged him.

"As the history of the Greeks is explained by the sight of Athens," he said, "and Virgil by seeing the Troad, so are the Holy Scriptures illuminated to the eyes of him who has seen Palestine."

Nor was it only the sacred places which were laid under contribution. The Jewish school of rabbis at Tiberias, heirs of the ancient rabbinical learning, were eagerly sought by them. All sources were sacred to Jerome from which a drop of the living water could be drawn.

Nor did he fail to find occasions for sarcastic allusions to the intemperate clergy and gluttonous monks who had encrusted with ice the living waters he had sought to set free at Rome. He remarked, with no flattering significance, that the town of Bethphage, one of the great seats of the Levitical priesthood, was appropriately termed "the city of jaw-bones."

From the traces of the sacred past, the pilgrims passed to Egypt, and to the heroes of the present, a present as sacred as the past.

My children, ever remember, when Christendom begins to speak of her golden age as in the past, she paganises!

The Christ liveth, liveth for evermore, in heaven and in His Church; has come, cometh, is to come.

To the apostles succeed the martyrs, to the martyrs the hermits, the missionaries. Which are best, I say not; each age *may* be the best; but in all is life.

At Alexandria Jerome especially sought the teaching of Didymus, successor of Origen, head of the great school of Clement; Didymus, "the blind seer," as Jerome called him, blind from infancy, yet mastering the wisdom of Plato, and of Aristotle, and of Origen, while avoiding all in them that could not be incorporated into the Catholic faith.

And thence they went to visit the City

of the Saints, the monasteries of the desert of Nitria, by the "river without water;" and yet further, to the caves and cells of the hermits among the Libyan mountains, where the passion for sacred solitude was developed with stern originality; to the two Macariuses by the lake of crocodiles, and to Serapion in his cavern, furnished only with a wooden cross, an old Bible, and a mat—Serapion, who in his youth had sold himself a slave to two comedians, for whose salvation he had yearned, and having rescued these by his life and words, had thenceforth devoted himself to the desert solitude.

Oh, holy love! ever welling forth at the heart of the austerities of the desert; as we of Rome proved so gloriously afterwards, and as you will see, my children, in the story I have yet to tell.

Paula's impressionable imagination was altogether captivated by the fathers of the desert, and by the poetry of these sacred solitudes. She and her Roman maidens, for a time forgetting even their chosen Bethlehem, would fain have founded a monastery in the Egyptian desert. But Jerome withheld her; Jerome who, having plunged into the furthest depths of the solitary and ascetic life through agonies which might have shaken any frame, had come out of them with an intelligence not weakened, but intensified, his strong common sense more than ever bared to see the bare truth of things; his satirical sense of incongruity sharpened, leaving nothing valuable behind him on the arena where he had fought for life (not even his good Latin and his love of Cicero), unless, perhaps, it might be forbearance with opponents (if

indeed he had ever any such faculty to leave behind).

Jerome, having rescued Paula from the fascinations of the desert, safely escorted the troop of pilgrims back to Bethlehem, where she founded three convents and he one monastery. There for many years she ruled her convents herself, sweeping the floors, lighting the lamps, and with her own hands sharing every service she required of her nuns. And there he, dwelling in his beloved cave, near the sacred cavern of the holy manger, established a grammar-school, to teach the ancient learning; and there, above all, he, cheered, and even, he said, aided by these noble Roman ladies, completed the great work of translating the Holy Scriptures into the vulgar tongue of the Roman world.

Ah, my children, sometimes I wonder

whence the Jerome will come who will do this work for your Teutonic world of the North. If Rome perishes, and you and your languages live on, no doubt the God who raised up Jerome for us Latins, will raise up a Jerome for you. Will your Jerome, I wonder, be as fiery, as controversial, as bitterly opposed, as falsely calumniated, as dearly beloved, as fiercely hated, as capable of intensely loving and vehemently hating, of anger and of tenderness, as ours? Who knows? The ages are long, and the kindreds and tongues and nations are many. Who but God knows what the nations will need and whom the ages will bring. For our Jerome was indeed bitterly opposed; as much now as a translator of the Scriptures, as he had been before as a reformer of the Roman Church.

The selfish Christians who had attacked

the fervent eloquence and the reforming zeal which won noble men and women to a devoted life on the Aventine, now turned against his new translation and revision of the sacred text.

Jerome, who had been a "leader captive of silly women," was now a heretic, an infidel, a latitudinarian,* an apostate, who did not fear to permit the sacrilegious hands of heretics and even of Jews to be laid on the very ark of God. A revision of the Septuagint! said the enemy. As well talk of a revision of the creation. A new translation! What then was to become of the sacred words dear with the memories of infancy? or of the costly manuscripts, for which their owners had paid untold sums?

Nevertheless, the revision was completed,

* In a translation it is difficult to render this word more accurately.

with the aid of the Jewish Rabbis of Tiberias; and the new translation into the vulgar tongue, called the Vulgate, seems likely to hold its own, and little likely to imperil the Catholic faith.

It was not, however, these pilgrimages, or even the ascetic lives of the fathers of the desert which most moved the heart of Theodoric, my husband. The vices, the cruelties, the base luxuries, the fierce excitements, the indolent fastidiousness; the luxury which involved the most atrocious cruelties, the cruelties which made torture a luxury; the idle populace, the servile nobles, and the thousand unnameable abominations of the theatre and the amphitheatre—all that made up the unutterable degradation, and brought about the ruin of Rome—these things pressed with terrible novelty on the heart of one who had grown up in the camps of a race

who, if barbarians, were at least men, and who had thought to find at Rome not only men, but Christians.

The works of mercy which flowed forth through Rome itself from the Aventine community, touched him more than these far-off marvels. For, moreover, with hearing clearer than ours, he who knew the North with its inexhaustible swarms of barbarians, ever heard, above and outside all the tumults and rioting, the languid music, and noisy feasting of the devoted city, the steady advancing tramp of the tribes which year by year were hemming in the Roman world. To him there was more terrible significance than to us in the rumours, alarming as they were, of the Huns taking Antioch and marching on Jerusalem, of one wild tribe threatening the northern frontier, and another piercing through it in the West.

For he, as a Goth, knew what we did not, the multitudinous numbers and the individual daring of those legions of nations. And he, as a Roman citizen, knew, as they did not, the effeminate helplessness of Rome.

Therefore to him the first thing seemed, to cut away the cancer which was eating at the heart of Rome itself.

This, he felt, was what Jerome and the little, devout, self-denying band on the Aventine had sought, were seeking still to do.

Among the refuges for orphans, for strangers, and for the sick, in the lowest parts of the city, he delighted to find his way. And thence he brought home many a report of deeds of pity and generous kindness, which, although I knew it not at the time, helped slowly to melt away the icy incredulity which had frozen my father's heart.

Above all the horrors of Rome, two were to him the most revolting—the gladiatorial games where his countrymen were slaughtered, and the troops of wretched mimes and dancers, held by thousands in slavery to their life of ignominy, for the amusement of Rome.

Well I remember two incidents connected with those two iniquities.

Both occurred at the beginning of this century, in 402, before the victory over the Goths at Pollentia.

One day, as we reclined around the table at supper, my father spoke of some strange news he had just heard.

“The Roman people has suffered a great blow,” he said. “Twenty-nine Saxon captives had been reserved in prison to be exhibited at the next gladiatorial games in the

Coliseum, to fight with each other and with wild beasts. When the day of the games arrived, it was found that these Saxons had strangled themselves in prison rather than fight each other on the arena. It seems they looked on it as a disgrace to brave men so to die. The pagan orator, Symmachus, had given these games in honour of his son's majority, and he declares that it was an impious act of the Saxons thus to disappoint the Roman people."

My father spoke with the dry quietness which was habitual to him, underneath which I knew well how much feeling was often repressed. But this my husband could not know.

Usually slowly moved, he started from the table, then, as if a dagger had pierced him.

"The Roman people will have to atone

for this," he said. "My countrymen did well. They did what all men among us would do, what our women would do, or our children—prefer death to dishonour. I will go and do my best that they may have such burial as befits brave men."

And, in spite of all remonstrance as to the peril of his purpose, he went out to accomplish it.

The other incident which stands out vividly in my memory, in connection with my husband's abhorrence of the iniquities of Rome, and his pity for her victims, occurred in the same year.

We were not without sorrow in our married life. "Such shall have trouble in the flesh" was not unfulfilled with us.

Of the four children given us, only one survived.

My Aunt Antonia was not without fears that these bereavements were a divine judgment on my not having followed the Higher Life to which she thought I might have had a vocation had I been more obedient.

I scarcely thought so. So irresistible always seemed to me the vocation of that dying voice to bring my father to the fold.

Yet Antonia's fears, saintly as she was, were not without terror for me.

And when our last child, a boy, was born, I entreated my husband that we might devote him to God, to the priesthood, and if it must be, to the monastic life.

Theodoric had rather deemed it service fitter his Gothic blood to give a soldier to the Christian Empire. But he consented.

The boy, Paulinus, was consecrated to heaven. And he has lived to minister to us in holy things, as ye all know.

It was a very mournful day to me.

The day before, we had laid our dead child in the family sepulchre in the Appian Way; and early that morning, in the little chapel of the catacombs in which was the picture of the Good Shepherd I so loved, we had solemnly consecrated another, the last spared to us, to the service of the Church.

Had faith been stronger with me, I ought to have rejoiced to have one immortal in the fold of the Good Shepherd above, and another in His arms below; one in the highest life, as I trust, in the Paradise of God, the other destined for the highest earthly life, in what Jerome called the paradise of the desert solitudes.

But, alas! both paradises seemed to me that evening strange and far away for babes that had nestled to my bosom.

I had rocked and sung my boy to sleep.

It was sweet to see the baby face in the repose of sleep, for through the day it had been flushed with a troubled expression, and I had feared he was going like the rest to the home already so full of the beloved, whose loss had been making the world empty to me.

Yet a pang mingled with my content; an unbelieving murmur surged in the depths of my inmost heart. The bitter thought crossed me that only because I had ceased to call him altogether mine would he be suffered to live; to live for what anguish of conflict, who could say? for what extremity of self-renunciation, involving renunciation of me, more terrible for the mother to endure than for him?

Could this darling, indeed, be left to me, on condition that I abandoned my maternal right in him?

So instead of giving thanks, I was half-resenting the hard conditions of surrender on which my petition seemed to have been granted, when my husband came in, and smiling on me, took the babe from my arms, laid him gently in those of the nurse, and led me silently out of the room.

His face and voice were full of deep emotion.

"My Læta," he said, "I have seen strange things to-day, and I bring thee tidings of great joy; great joy in heaven, and surely to thee."

And then he told me the sight he had seen that day.

It was Holy Saturday—Easter Eve. May I be forgiven! but that Easter, as I think never before or since, my heart had been so absorbed in my own peculiar share of the burdens—the one death that left

our home dark, the one sacrifice which might make my life desolate—that I had scarcely thought of the great burdens of the world, or of Him who had borne them, of the sacrifice of the Lord, or of the joy of His Church.

On Easter Eve it was customary for the penitents of the churches of Rome to do public penance, prostrating themselves in sordid garments, sprinkled with ashes, before the doors of the church still closed to them, but perhaps, if absolution were possible, to be opened on the morrow.

Theodoric had seen an immense crowd gathered before the great doors of the Lateran Basilica. An unusual excitement seemed to agitate the multitude, swaying them hither and thither with angry and applauding murmurs.

He had asked what it was.

"A daughter of the great Fabian House is about to degrade herself and Rome at the bidding of the monk Jerome!" was the angry reply.

It was Fabiola.

She had just returned from Palestine, where Jerome had pronounced unhesitatingly that it was a crime to have separated herself from her first husband and married another in his lifetime.

According to Roman law, she had done nothing which made her guilty, and this was what so greatly incensed her family.

To proclaim herself a criminal in the face of all Rome was bad enough.

But by that very proclamation to raise the sentence of this Dalmatian monk, or even of the Church, above the Roman law, above the Emperor, above all authority, was at least in the eyes of the pagans a great

aggravation of the offence. But Fabiola was not to be moved.

Deeper things than technicalities of Roman or even ecclesiastical law, were in her heart.

Both her marriages had been contracted in wilful and passionate haste, with men whose characters ought to have suffered them to have no attraction for her.

The desecration had perhaps been almost as much in marriage as in the divorce.

It was no fictitious sin she bewailed, and hers was no feigned penitence.

Indeed nothing that she did could be done languidly or coldly or by halves.

I recognised at once the fervent, impulsive Fabiola who had always so attracted me in the Aventine Palace, in what he told me of her.

The luxuriant hair which I remembered

streaming over her shoulders, sprinkled with ashes; her beautiful brilliant face, pale, and stained with tears—no ceremonial tears, one might be sure, from those true eyes; clad in coarse raiment, she prostrated herself among the lowest penitents before the closed doors of the basilica—closed until absolution should open them, and pardon be extended to her, only as to the humblest suppliant there.

To her that public penance was no brief expiatory ceremonial to enable her to return with a salved conscience to a life of ease and self-satisfaction. It was the putting off for ever of the old things, and the putting on of the new; the abandoning for ever of the old brilliant, luxurious life, and the entering irrevocably on a life of humiliation and charity—such as the Church among us had scarcely yet beheld.

The heart of Theodoric went out in generous sympathy for the noble, beautiful woman he had seen sought and honoured throughout Rome for her beauty, her bright intelligence, and her rank, conscious of all she possessed and proud of all,—now humbling herself in the dust before the populace of Rome.

It was quite another kind of humiliation from that recently performed by Melania, when, on an ill-conditioned ass, she headed a procession of her admiring kindred in chariots and on richly caparisoned horses, doubly honoured by the crowd around at once on account of the ass and the chariots.

Fabiola's humiliation was of another kind. And the crowd around her was no admiring procession.

Bitter and severe and coarse were the

comments that greeted her in her prostration and her sordid garments; although murmurs of approval from some who had tasted of her generous charity, or hoped to taste it, were not altogether lacking even then.

It happened that just as Theodoric was leaving the crowd to return to me, a noisy troop of mimes and dancing girls from one of the theatres swept by, making mocking comments on Fabiola and her sins.

But amongst them was the slight, shrinking form of a woman, who seemed to be swept reluctantly along with them. He thought she looked imploringly at him, as they passed.

His way happened to be for a space with this dissolute troop, and suddenly, as they turned the corner of a narrow street, he saw again this shrinking figure

crouched in an angle of the wall, left behind the rest.

To his amazement she knelt at his feet, and murmured, "Save me. Your wife knows me. Save me from these fiends."

It was Zosima. She had fallen from depth to depth; had become attached to the theatre, and was now one of those wretched slaves of the public amusements whom the Roman populace would not suffer to depart from Rome, even when famine obliged them to banish all useless mouths.

Full of pity and perplexity he said,—

"There is but one way of liberation from such bondage as yours. Can you be baptized into the Christian Church?"

"I am no Christian," she said despairingly. "I have tried to become one, but they mock me, and say that cannot be suffered until I die. Unless you can hide me

somewhere now, and save me before they come to seek me, there is no liberation for me but death."

He did not hesitate an instant.

To our house she could not be brought.

But he knew Fabiola had already a home for the sick, not far off; and thither he went, bidding the terror-stricken, conscience-stricken creature follow. He waited till Fabiola returned, and ventured to commit the lost one to her.

He had indeed brought me a gift—an immortal, heavenly joy.

Not the lamb only, the wild wandering kid on the Good Shepherd's shoulder—safe at last!

She was among the first of the many lost and sick and suffering whom Fabiola, who could give nothing without giving with

it her own fervent, generous heart, tended and nursed with her own hands.

I craved to see and comfort her. At first she passionately refused to see me. I had loved her, she said, loved her and trusted her, and deemed her innocent, and she could not bear me to see her.

The first among us whom she consented to see was Antonia.

"She knew and abhorred me," she said; "to see her will do me good. If she could begin to hope for me now, I could perhaps begin to hope for myself."

And they told me the first tears which moistened those despairing eyes were shed over the severe Antonia's bosom.

Antonia knelt, laid her hands, aged now and wrinkled, on the poor head bowed to the ground before her. And then she raised her, and gently sate down beside her, and

the face once so fair was hidden on her breast.

"Perhaps, if I had been gentler with thee, it might have been better for us both," Antonia said. "But the child loved and trusted thee, and I trembled for her.

"God knows, I have spent many a night in prayer for thee, for the child never ceased to love thee. And, for her sake, first, I prayed, till pity for thee thyself began to come instead of loathing. I thought of Pelagia, and of the words of the holy Egyptian bishop she came to tempt. 'I see her as a dove, all black and soiled, but she shall be washed, and shall rise to heaven white as snow.'"

The shame and despair of years which had encrusted the poor passionate heart melted into hope, and convulsed with sobs, the lost clung to the spotlessly pure.

Nor was the gain all Zosima's.

When I first saw her, she was so changed, I should not have known her, but for the ghost of the old brilliant smile.

She was moving noiselessly in her dark woollen dress, from one sick bed in Fabiola's hospital to another, giving cooling drink to one, binding the wounds of another. But there was a light of peace I had never seen before, on her face, and a tender content in the way she pressed my hands to her cheek, which made me feel it was sweeter to her than the close sisterly embrace I would have given her.

Restraint of emotion meant something deeper in her than its indulgence. "Not yet!" her wistful eyes seemed to say, "but all, more than all, may yet be given back by-and-by!"

Fabiola had balm in the example of her

life for deeper wounds than those she healed with her hands.

The Church had gathered beneath her brooding wings one more of the outcasts whom none else deemed it possible or worth while to rescue.

CHAPTER VIII.

NOT long after that day of the public penitence of Fabiola, and the rescue of Zosima, my husband was summoned, with the body of faithful Goths under his command, to defend the empire against Alaric, who had been ravaging Venetia for many months, and was now making his first attempt to sweep down through Italy on Rome.

But for a brief time after that day our life at home flowed on in a deep tranquillity.

A brief moment, like the calm at the meeting of two currents; at least to me it seemed

so, folding my child in motherly love, and myself enfolded and guarded by the love of husband and father, the strong arms of the Gothic soldier, and his fearless heart.

To him the murmur of the northern floods was never silent, however distant; the hoarse murmur of that devouring tide of nations without; and, within, the tumultuous surging of the fountains of the great deeps of vice and misery in the Empire.

“We Goths are but the foremost wave,” he would say. “Behind us are hosts of wandering men, wilder and fiercer than we, pressed on by the great craving to possess this marvellous Rome, and by what else, or by whom, we know not—Huns, Alans, Vandals. Their name is legion. And to encounter them, what has Rome but rich men too luxurious to fight, poor men too

wretched and degraded to fight, a host of silken townsmen and of scourge-driven slaves, and such of us as Roman treachery has spared or Roman gold can buy?"

Always, moreover, one great name was gathering terror, rising more and more distinct amidst the tumult; the name of Alaric, the great Gothic chief and general.

All the grand old names of Greece had fallen before him; Athens dearly ransoming herself; Argos, Corinth, Sparta pillaged.

And now he threatened Rome. And what was Rome, my father said, but another grand old name?

So our Theodoric went northward to encounter the hosts of Alaric and fight for the wicked Empire he despised, which yet was intertwined with the Christian Church he revered;—to fight for his child and for me.

I never saw him more. The Empire had little pride in recording the valiant deeds of Gothic men, allies or foes.

I only know he died victorious, at Pol-lentia. The hosts of Alaric were beaten back for the time. Rome was saved for yet eight years.

But our home was as it were thenceforth unroofed, and laid bare to all the floods and storms, come whence they might.

A feeble, defenceless household we were left in the midst of a world breaking up before the deluge; a widowed woman and her babe, and my father now an aged man. But however Theodoric had died, of two things I was sure—he had fallen as a brave man, and as a Christian. He was living still, immortal, rewarded, in the kingdom where faithful servants meet other recognition than emperors bestow on faithful service;

with the great army of the martyrs and the conquerors, strong, and blest for evermore.

And for me there were tasks enough left. Happy are those to whom sorrow suffers no idleness, on whose brooding regrets the voices of little children are for ever breaking, often, it may be, piercing the heart with fresh anguish, but never suffering it to fall into the stony languor of uninterrupted grief.

Little hands that came ruthlessly demanding unbroken care and kindness, when others kept aloof in reverence for a sorrow they could not console,—thank God their healing touches came to me then!

Thank God I had not a vocation to seek, but duties which sought me, caressing, worrying, wearying me back from death to life. From peaceful death to bitter life, it

often seemed! Yet still to life. And so to those who, having died in Christ, lived for evermore.

For life and all that is living, life in its fullest force, life in its highest joy, life in its deepest service, life not death, my children, unites us to the blessed who live evermore.

Meantime the "Domestic Church" on the Aventine went nobly on its way; Fabiola built churches and maintained monasteries at Rome and on the coast of Tuscany, and at Ostia a hostelry for strangers and pilgrims, with fervent charity ministering to the sick and suffering, not only with her substance, but with her own hands.

The bonds between us and the monasteries of Bethlehem were close as ever. Pammachius, son-in-law of Paula, bereaved of his wife Paulina, devoted himself and

his riches to the service of the Church and the poor,—thus best consoling Paula.

And one letter of Jerome's to Paula's young son Toxotius and his wife Læta was especially dear to me.

Toxotius, the young son whom Paula, obeying, as she believed, the call of God, had left doubly orphaned on the shores at Ostia, had long cherished a bitter resentment against the faith which had robbed him of his mother. But his young wife Læta, and doubtless his mother's prayers, won him back to the fold.

Herself the daughter of a Christian mother and a pagan father, pontiff of the pagan gods, Læta was a fervent Christian. More faithful and fervent doubtless than I had been, since God gave her father so much sooner to her prayers.

Like ourselves, Læta and Toxotius had

lost many infants before the little Paula was given to them, and devoted to the religious life on the tomb of a martyr.

The young mother taught the child to lisp the word Alleluia, the first that passed its lips. She wrote to entreat Jerome to trace her a plan of education for this babe. And tenderly the old man responded, having doubtless held many a consultation on the intricate subject with the child's grandmother and aunt, Paula and Eustochium.

"The little one," he wrote, "would win the old pagan Pontiff to the faith, lisping on his knee the Christian watchword of triumph. Jupiter himself must be converted, had he such a family. The Pontiff may burst into laughter and mock my letter, may call me stupid and mad. His son-in-law Toxotius has done as much before him. Men are not born, they become Christians."

Then, looking forward with prophetic vision, Jerome went on to say how on the Capitol, black with neglect, he beheld the temples of Rome covered with moss and spiders' webs, whilst its people, deserting the ruined shrines, inundated in floods the tombs of the martyrs.

"Send the little one to Bethlehem," he said; "let her repose in the manger of Jesus. Confide to Eustochium this babe, whose inarticulate murmurs are as prayers for thee. Let thy child see, love, admire her whose every movement and word, whose whole demeanour teaches virtue. Let this new Paula be cradled in the bosom of her grandmother, who will recommence for her what she has so happily done for her own child."

He claimed himself a share in these cares; he would be her foster-father, her school-

master, would teach her to walk, to speak, to read.

"Send her to me," he wrote; "I will carry her about on my shoulders; I will prattle and lisp to accommodate myself to her baby language. And, believe me I will be prouder of my employment than ever Aristotle was of his. The philosopher had to instruct a king of Macedonia, destined to perish in the East by poison. I will mould the heart of a spouse of Christ, to whom the crown of heaven shall not fail."

Then, scarcely hoping, no doubt, for such a sacrifice, he counselled Læta how, herself, to win the child to goodness by little gifts of flowers, and things precious to the little ones, luring her to the Source of all love and beauty.

His counsels were faithfully and successfully followed, and this new Paula having

taken the veil and fillet of virginity, went to help her grandmother and Eustochium, in the monasteries at Bethlehem; and there, when all the rest had died, she, the last of that noble race, closed the eyes of the aged Jerome.

That letter of Jerome came from no paradise of rest. Indeed, repose was never Jerome's atmosphere.

For many years Melania and Rufinus, once Jerome's friends, had, from their monasteries on the Mount of Olives, been exciting suspicion and tumult against him and the monasteries of Paula at Bethlehem.

There were accusations of heresy, of Origenism, of false philosophy, to all of which Jerome was not slow or mild in retort. He declared that Melania's name symbolised the blackness of her character, and erased all eulogy of her from his works.

Melania herself, never kept by languor or hesitation from the fulfilment of her purposes, good or evil, rushed back like a torrent on Rome. The terrible lady had a double purpose to accomplish; to break up the happy married life of her grand-daughter, Melania the younger, and to detach the Aventine community from Jerome.

In the first she succeeded, after sharp agonies of conflict in the hearts of the young husband and wife, who were tenderly attached, and after slow years of endeavour to make a compromise between their love for each other and the call to the monastic life.

That Christian household was at once broken up; the only child, a daughter, sent into a convent, the early home of their first married love reluctantly sold, and a life of pilgrimage to Africa, to Egypt, to Syria,

begun. Yet still of pilgrimage side by side; the wife contributing to their support by transcribing manuscripts, the husband, once prefect of Rome, by gardening; until at last the grandmother's slow but mighty solvent had done its work, and the two whom the Church had united, and who had clung to each other so fondly, separated at last—the young Melania into a cell on the Mount of Olives, Pinianus to cultivate a garden of herbs with thirty other monks.

Against the faithful Aventine community, however, Melania's dissolving eloquence broke in vain.

She was no longer received as a member of the *Ecclesia Domestica*, where she had once been so much honoured. Thus, rejected, as she deemed, of a faithless generation, Melania demeaned herself more and more as a prophetess, a voice crying in the

wilderness. She prophesied the speedy destruction of the world and all things in it, which, indeed, as to that Roman world, crumbling and crashing visibly and audibly to ruin, it required little prophetic insight to foresee.

"Antichrist would soon appear," she declared, "and wars without number burst upon them; and would they cling to their doomed houses and cankered riches?"

The very name of Melania seemed to revive in my father all the old horror of Christianity as a "Moloch's worship, murderously sacrificing the Present to an unknown Future."

The simple loyalty, the manly piety of my husband, the sweetness of our home-life with the child, recalling to him the lost sweetness of my mother, the beneficence of Fabiola, the lofty purity of the Domestic Church,

seemed to have been slowly melting away his prejudices, and distilling into his heart a sense of the reality of the religion which could inspire characters so diverse, yet all so beautiful.

And now Melania seemed to appear as an incarnation of the extreme consequences of all he dreaded in Christianity, and to drive him back, not indeed to Paganism, but to an incapacity for believing in the existence of Truth.

In my dismay and despair, my mind turned to the great Bishop Augustine, of Hippo, philosophical and profound, men said, as Plato, having himself pressed his way through host after host of temptations and heresies to the Catholic faith, to the holiest life, and to the rest of his whole being in God.

I resolved to make a pilgrimage to Hippo,

with the babe and my father, and to commend him to the teaching of Augustine.

My father did not refuse; although I did not attempt to conceal from him my purpose. His scepticism, from a mild approval of all religions as more or less beautiful, and a mild rejection of all creeds as more or less incredible, had become a mournful sense of incapacity to grasp truth.

"If Augustine can help me," he said, "my Læta, to see what thou seest, it will be a beneficent miracle, better than that on the two blind men at Jericho. But who can see with the eyes of another? Who knows even what he really sees with his own?"

So, full of hope, I sailed across the Mediterranean to the African shores, past the ancient Greek cities on the Italian and Sicilian coasts, and the temples crowning the heights, where still Neptune and the old

gods were worshipped with processions of the peasantry.

Along the African shore, we touched at city after city, where three civilisations and three races met—the people of Rome, still imperial; the ancient Phœnician foes of our Rome; the colonists from Greece, who once swarmed from their hives east and west and filled the world as you Teutons of the North do now. And in every busy port, with its merchantmen and sailors, and in every stately city, was a Christian Church. Like a fringe of gems they bordered the African continent. Beyond, there were rumours of wild tribes stretching far away. But with those the Christians had not to do. The one Roman world was to become the one Catholic Church. And then, the rest of the nations, Ethiopia and Saba, must surely soon stretch out their hands unto the Christ.

A wild sea-port population dwelt in this Hippo, the city of the great Bishop Augustine, as was proved afterwards, when they would have torn Pinianus from his young wife Melania, and by force made him a priest.

She was of as ancient date as any, this African Church, and had given from her fervent heart the earliest martyrs and the earliest doctors to the Catholic Church.

The land of Perpetua and Felicitas, of Tertullian and Cyprian, was sacred ground to any Christian.

There is something in these confluences of many races which seem to quicken human life.

Sometimes I hope it may be so with this awful rushing together of the South and North. Out of these whirlpools, who knows but there may yet arise a richer, fairer

Christendom than that which has perished in Africa, which often seems perishing everywhere?

Augustine had gathered his clergy into a community, not recluse, not retiring to the deserts to flee from sin and to adore God, but a company of priests severing themselves from the closest human ties in order to be closer to their people; banding themselves together as the shepherds that kept watch over their flocks by night.

Some good, I think, came to my father from Augustine, though not all I hoped. But what blessing reached him through Augustine came more, I think, from what Christianity had made Augustine than from what Augustine's intellect made of Christianity.

"This African thinks powerfully," my father said. "The fire in him is of the keenest, and the metal of the purest. All

the fuel of the systems of the past which have been thrown into it would have quenched the fire had it been weaker. Instead, they have fed the flames and fused the metal. The fire is intense, and the metal incorruptible and pure.

"But after all, may not the metal as well as the fire be only *his*? His, not divine? His, not mine?

"Other men have thought before on the origin of evil, the freedom of the will, the necessity of sequences, the substance of being, whether the universe is but a thought of the soul, or the soul an atom in the universe. Augustine's thoughts seem to me profound and wise: that God is the only Being, the Foundation of all Being, the Beauty in all the beautiful, the Good in all goodness, the True in all truth; that evil is but the negation and and privation of good.

"But after all," he would say, "these are

but Augustine's thoughts, explaining more or less what *is*, all the same, whatever he thinks about it. These Manicheans, from whom he escaped (originating, it is said, in a farther East than Syria, and in an earlier incarnation than this of the Christ), assert that matter, indestructible and uncontrollable, is co-eternal with God, and therefore evil co-eternal with good.

"At least it is plain that evil co-exists with good, unconquered from age to age, mighty as far back as we can see, and as mighty as ever to-day.

"If God is omnipotent, and evil only a negation of Him, why does it not only exist but grow? Negations do not grow. Darkness does not grow but by light failing, or cold but by heat being quenched.

"Either He created the world out of a blind substance He could not control and

make good, or He created creatures with wills He could not control. Augustine may take one explanation, the Manicheans another. Neither explains to me the whole. I am not sure which explains the largest half.

"If God is omnipotent, and is also love, not mere passive goodness, but active love, is the mystery less?

"Are the gladiatorial games, the sacks of cities, the horrors of the slave trade, and the slave barracks, the vices of the Roman populace, the vices of the Imperial Court, more explicable?

"*Thoughts*, my Læta, only human thoughts, after all!" he would say, "searchings, explainings! What are they from the days of the wise men of old but a vibrating from one side to another of the insoluble problem?

"The thoughts ebb and flow, and intertwine and disentwine, but the problem remains."

It was on our last night in Africa that he spoke thus to me.

We were looking out from the roof of our house over the sea, undulating in the gold and crimson of the sunset: above, the depths of the serene sky; beneath, the vessel that was to take us home on the morrow, balancing on the waves.

He turned to me, and seeing, I suppose, how sad his words made me (I had hoped so much from the wisdom of the wisest of Christian men), he laid his hand on my shoulder and said—

“Forgive me, my Læta. I am an old man, perhaps too weary of the endless ebb and flow of thought; not like a river, it seems to me, flowing on and fertilising, but like the restless heaving to and fro of the salt and barren sea.

“Yet despair not for me. Perhaps for thy purpose we did not come hither in vain.

"The least true life is more to me than any thinking.

"And such I have seen. On the Aventine. In Fabiola's hospital. In our home," he added, with a low and tender accent. "And here at Hippo.

"Augustine's thoughts may be a fountain of thought to a world less worn out than ours, and to minds less weary than mine.

"But Augustine's conversion is a reality. The power that won him from sin to purity, self-sacrifice, and heaven must, I think, be real—real as the passionate instincts it saved him from, real as the insoluble problems against which his magnificent powers of thinking flood and foam.

"It is the *something underneath* thy mother's tenderness making it strong; it is the *something underneath* Jerome's austere asceticism making it tender; the *something*

underneath Fabiola's passionate remorse, turning it into beneficence; the *something underneath* Augustine's subtle philosophic thinking, making it a power which the old thinking never had to renew the common life of men; it is this *something underneath*, so alike in its principle, so diverse in its working, which moves me.

"My Læta, a faint hope, a little glimmering sometimes comes to me, a dim momentary flash of a possibility that this Power has something to do with that Life and that Death in Syria which none before or since, it seems to me, have ever equalled, or approached, or even comprehended."

We said no more that evening.

But as I knelt beside my sleeping child that night, visibly, audibly the Good Shepherd seemed present to me.

"*All but* in His arms!" I thought.

“Did any ever draw so near and not be brought home rejoicing? not wake up to see Thee and adore Thee altogether, whether the waking be here or there?”

CHAPTER IX.

So we sailed again by the Sicilian cities to Italy, to Ostia, to the old home in Rome. There seemed little probability of any spiritual help coming to us at that time in Rome. The city was in a tumult of delight at the prospect of the gladiatorial games, which the Emperor Honorius had proclaimed as his gift to Rome in honour of his sixth consulate.

The Christian Emperor Honorius!

There were Gothic captives and Roman criminals, and the bands of the trained gladiators; and in the port of Ostia when we arrived were many ships from which came the

savage howling of Numidian lions, and of fierce tigers and leopards, or the dull growlings of the great bears from the North. Burning tropical deserts and arctic snows, slave-markets, prisons of debt and crime, every zone of the world Rome governed, all the depths of human misery and sin which she contained, had been ransacked to furnish this feast of blood for the Roman people, the people of this wretched Rome, so soon herself to furnish a feast of blood to the barbarians.

All through the empire, along the marvelous network of roads to Gaul and Britain, to the deserts of Syria and of Egypt and of Africa, the festival had been proclaimed.

We had heard it in Africa.

And one had heard it in his cell amidst the solitudes of Egypt!

There was great excitement in Rome.

The pagans for the most part looked on it as a triumph.

Christians such as Diotima spoke dubiously of the necessity of not yielding to an enervating pitifulness, of keeping up the courage of the Roman Senate and people by inuring them to the sight of battle and death.

On the Aventine there was shame, and fasting and prayer, and an agony of indignant pity; but all, it seemed, in vain.

Prudentius, the Spanish gentleman and Christian poet, had written a poem to the Emperor, remonstrating, imploring that the agonies of slaughtered men might no more be made a joy for other men and women in the Christian Empire, and in Christian Rome.

Some merciful men among the pagans had denounced it of old. Bishops had pleaded and had menaced; and remon-

strances, such as those of Ambrose, had power over emperors strong and wilful as Theodosius. Yet this enormous iniquity seemed unconquerable. Never was there to be a grander exhibition than this preparing for the Coliseum now.

The wild beasts were ready in their dens close to the arena. No puny animals, it was said, half-tamed by captivity, but splendid, untamed, untamable creatures, wild from the deserts and the snows.

The prowess and strength of the trained gladiators were in every one's mouth. They were panting, it was said, for the fray.

Some righteous vengeance, moreover, and some patriotic enthusiasm were to be gratified in the slaughter of criminals and captives, slaves who would, no doubt, have murdered their masters if they could, Goths who had menaced Rome!

So the beasts in their dens, and the gladiators in their schools, the captives in the dungeons, and all Rome couched around them, and, panting like the fiercest of the wild beasts for their blood, waited for the great day which was to begin the games.

At last it dawned. A winter's day, clear in its pitiless sunshine, the 1st of January, in the year of our Lord 404.

Never, I thought, had a darker day dawned on Rome.

Early in the morning the streets were thronged with eager, excited crowds, each man and woman and child pressing forward for good places in the Coliseum, where eighty thousand could find room. The lofty chariots of the senators thundered through the narrow streets, cleared for their passage by troops of slaves; the divided floods of the fierce and idle populace, gathering again when they

had passed, and following them with jests or plaudits.

It was still early when we went out; the streets were empty and silent, the Coliseum was full, and the whole life of Rome seemed concentrated around that terrible arena, the whole fierce blood of the city sent back for the moment to that throbbing heart.

It was not the first time.

Christian martyrs had been among the victims there not so long before.

But every time of its repetition, as Christianity grew and triumphed and reigned, the horror of this great iniquity which it could not conquer weighed more heavily on Christian hearts.

A few of us met that day in the Oratory in Marcella's Palace on the Aventine.

The daily prayers were prayed, and the psalms were chanted, as was usual.

But among us that day all longing, all dread, all prayer, seemed gathered into one agonized, "O Lord, how long?"

From time to time we would hear distinctly through the city, in which all the ordinary din of traffic was hushed, the prolonged shout of the eighty thousand in the Coliseum, proclaiming, as we knew too well, some fresh scene of torture and slaughter.

Cruel, demoniacal shouts! They rose above the music of our psalms. And when audible prayer and psalm had ceased, and we remained together, praying in silence for the city which was heaping up such vengeance for herself, wilder and more frequent the cry came on us through the stillness, going up, we felt, to God.

But to me it seemed as if a door were opened in heaven, and "from beneath the altar" came the voice of another multitude,

greater than that gathered in the Coliseum, "crying with a loud voice, *How long, O Lord, holy and true?*"

And as I listened to that voice of the great multitude whom no man can number, and prayed, the shouts from the Coliseum seemed to me to grow feeble and puny, as the shouts of angry children, before that great accumulating tide of prayer from the victorious host on high.

The "how long" must come to an end at last, because the "Holy and True" can never come to an end.

The "how long" must at last end in the Alleluia!

Suddenly, as we knelt absorbed in devotion in that quiet place, a shout arose, a yell, so tumultuous, so terrible, so prolonged, that we all rose to our feet, and pale and trembling gathered close to each other, looking with

awe-stricken faces into each other's eyes, and clasping one another's quivering hands.

It seemed as if the whole city had grown mad with a delirium of blood, as if Rome itself must have become one Coliseum, one arena, and all the Romans be massacring each other as the last offering on that dreadful funeral pile.

It seemed as if the tumult would never cease. But as we listened, by degrees it became less concentrated. The sounds divided, and some drew nearer us.

And again we all fell on our knees in a passion of prayer, not knowing what terror the next moment might bring.

At length the sounds grew fainter, and looking up, I saw at the door of the Oratory a vision I had never seen in any Christian church before.

My father stood before me.

He drew my hand into his, and led me to the door, and there, with a voice almost inaudible from emotion, he said—

“He has fallen; but he has conquered! The Galilæan has conquered. And, oh, my Læta, thy Christ has for ever conquered me!”

Then in broken words he told that day’s wonderful story, whilst the little Aventine community gathered around us and listened.

“In the height of the combat, when two bands of gladiators stood ready to rush at each other, and all the eighty thousand were silent with the panting hush of cruel expectation, a stranger from Egypt, in the garb of an anchorite, cleft the masses of the crowd, stepped on the arena, stood between the troops of infuriated combatants, and sought to separate them.

“Alone he stood amidst that maddened crowd. Perhaps he thought some responsive

instinct of mercy would awaken at his act in Christian Rome.

“Perhaps he knew better the temper of the crowd, and hoped for no response, but only to die, as so many had died there before, a martyr for the compassionate Christ.

“What he thought will never be known. What he did will be known to endless ages.

“He stood there with outstretched arms, still seeking to part the combatants, until the momentary start of surprise had turned into a fierce resentment against the helpless foreigner who sought to interrupt the pleasures of Rome. Showers of stones were thrown on him, as on your first martyr, and he fell mangled and crushed under the feet of the combatants he would have separated and saved. And then at last their swords ended the heroic life, amidst the yells and triumphant shouts of the multitude.

They say he was an obscure monk from the deserts of Egypt, that in his lonely cell the proclamation of this day's iniquities had reached him, and stirred his heart with a divine pity and courage. No one here knows him. Alone he seems to have been inspired with that sacred purpose in his lonely cell. Alone he crossed sea and land to Rome, to the Coliseum, to the arena. They say his name was Telemachus; but of his history no man knows anything save what some deem this fruitless sacrifice of himself. But those who know best say it will not be fruitless, that the gladiatorial games are done with in Rome for ever."

Once more we all knelt together in the Oratory on the Aventine; and with us, with bowed head, in silence, knelt my father.

And strange as it might seem, the only word that came to our lips was "Alleluia."

So sure it seemed to us, by a kind of inspiration, that this would be but another section of the sacred story of the victories of the Vanquished, of the conquests by the Cross.

And so in truth it proved.

Never afterwards was there a gladiatorial combat in the Coliseum. The Emperor issued an edict against gladiatorial games, which was never again infringed in Rome.

As we sate alone in our home that night, my boy on my father's knee, and I sitting at his feet—

“Ah, my Læta!” he said, “*there is something underneath.* There is a new life in the world moved by divine instincts, that neither the world, nor (it seems to me) the Church wholly comprehend; and infinite love under-

neath all the inexplicable perplexities of the world; a life deeper than those who live by it know; a love guiding those it moves to higher ends than they intend.

“And that love is Christ, is God.

“That living water which bursts through the arid sands of the Egyptian desert, springs from a source far deeper than the sands.

“That monk drawing deep draughts of world-wide humanity from the solitude which seemed to cut him off from all humanity, has convinced me.

“Wrong or right in his self-isolation, the Being with whom he isolated himself is Love.

“Not in the rocks, or on the barren sands, was his real refuge, but with a Heart.

“From man he fled to Him who loved man more than Himself.

"The pity that touched the heart of the Son of God in heaven for a lost world, reached the heart of the Christian monk in his desert, for this wretched lost Rome in her cruelty, and for her victims in their anguish.

"The sacred footprints of the Divine Sufferer drew the discipline on through deserts and seas, and hostile crowds.

"The servant treads the Master's path to the end. He also suffers and dies.

"But a new life has come into the world that shall never die.

"And that life is Christ; thy Christ and mine; and thou and I are His for ever."

And so, my children, the world was delivered from one more of its great wrongs.

And so the prayer and devotion of all my

life, and of a better life than mine, were fulfilled.

And even so, "Good Shepherd, *both*," we went on our way together, towards her, with and towards Thee.

CHAPTER X.

AND this is all the story I had to tell you of the old life at Rome. But you wish to hear the end of those who lived it with me.

All, all have passed away. The Ecclesia Domestica, that band of brave and holy and beneficent men and women on the Aventine; Melania, with her restless untiring enterprise; Paula, Jerome, and Eustochium, with the monasteries at Bethlehem; Augustine and the whole church of Africa.

Time came with slow step, and closed the career of some, and war has torn away the rest.

Paula was the first to depart.

Not a month after Telemachus fell martyred amidst the stones of Christian Rome, and with his death gave the death-blow to the gladiatorial games, Paula died.

Tender affection was warm around her to the last; her daughter Eustochium would not suffer any one to share the care of her mother's sick-bed. It was she who day and night watched beside her during the weeks of that last illness, smoothing her pillow, bringing hot water to warm the chilled limbs, unweariedly fanning the fevered brow, and only leaving her in the intervals of broken sleep, to go and pray at the shrine in the cave close by, where the infant Saviour had been laid in the manger; to entreat that she might not be left to live, her mother absent, bereaved of that dear companionship from which she had never been severed.

From time to time Jerome came to cheer the child and the dying mother.

Paula alone of the three was calm and content; calm, doubtless, in the certainty that, in the Father's House to which she was going, the waiting for the coming of those she had so dearly loved would not seem long.

She kept murmuring verses of the Psalms; recurring chiefly to two or three.

"Lord, I have loved the habitation of thine house, and the place where thine honour dwelleth."

"How amiable are thy tabernacles, O Lord of hosts! My soul longeth, yea, even fainteth, for the desire it hath to thy courts." Those earthly courts whither she had led so many to praise and pray; those heavenly courts on whose threshold she lay now.

Again and again she murmured the sacred words.

Then for a time she lay silent, giving no answer to anything they said to her. Jerome approached her bedside and asked her why she was silent, and if she suffered.

She replied in Greek, the mother tongue of her father, perhaps the first in which she had learned to lisp, that "nothing molested her, but all things lay quiet and tranquil before her, clear to her vision."

These were her last unbroken words.

She closed her eyes, as if desiring to see no more of earth.

But through the last agony which followed, they could still catch in broken syllables the verses of the Psalms she had loved to murmur; until to "the habitation" of Him she loved, to the Father's House, her spirit passed away, at the moment of the setting of the sun.

No wailing or bitter lamentation was suffered to break the sacred silence around her bier.

The poor and the bereaved called her their nurse and their mother. Her convents and monasteries on all sides poured forth their companies of monks and nuns; and from the caves in the mountain sides, hermit after hermit made his solitary way to swell the great choir which chanted around her bier, in Greek and Latin and Hebrew and Syriac.

But to Eustochium, for the time, anguish at her loss overpowered every other feeling.

She would not leave the bier, kissing the closed eyelids, pressing her cheek against the cold lips; and at last, when the bier was about to be lowered, throwing herself passionately on it, clasping it with her

arms, and demanding to be buried beside it.

Jerome's grief at the breaking of that long and most pure and tender friendship, went with him to the grave.

It was long before he could resume any of his work, even that on the Holy Scriptures.

The most sacred paths were precisely those which were fullest of Paula. Together they had for twenty years studied the divine words. She and Eustochium only, he said, could in the first instance have decided him "to resume the plough, to trace the furrows, and to clear away the tares which were being incessantly sown around the Holy Writings."

"Do you," he wrote to them, "competent judges of textual controversy, open the original Hebrew, and compare it with my

translation to see if I have rashly hazarded a single word."

"Paula knew the Scriptures by heart," he wrote, "and whilst always loving the historical interpretation and the natural sense, which are the foundation of their truth, she sought with passion for the spiritual sense, as fitter for the elevation of the soul. Her mind, difficult to content, desired to fathom the depths of everything."

"When I had to acknowledge my ignorance, she did not so easily surrender."

"This Hebrew language, which it has cost me so much pains to learn imperfectly, she seemed to learn as a pastime, and acquired thoroughly, pronouncing it even without a shade of the Latin accent."

Through Paula and Eustochium and the Convent of the Aventine, he had learned to recognise the greatness and goodness possible

to womanhood in all times and nations. "Huldah prophesied," he said, "when men were silent; Deborah conquered when Barak trembled; Judith and Esther saved the people of God. And among the Greeks, Plato listened to Aspasia; Sappho held the lyre beside Alcæus and Pindar; and with the Romans, beside Cornelia, and the wife of Brutus, even the inflexible virtue and austerity of the noblest Roman men grow pale. It would take volumes to relate the greatness there has been in women."

And now that stimulating, steady, inspiring companionship was over.

The first thing that roused Jerome from his hopeless languor of grief, was the entreaty of Eustochium that he would write something in commemoration of her mother, before the dear details of her life and death had grown faint in their memories.

He tried to obey her. But his fingers grew numb, the style fell from his hands, grief seemed to take away his breath.

At last he began to dictate, and in the long vigils of two nights he finished Paula's Memoir, tracing her history from her illustrious ancestors, through her youth, her married life, and her widowhood, narrating their journeys together in Palestine and Egypt.

He wrote these sacred recollections for her child:—"At thy desire I have dictated this book, in the vigils of two nights, for I have never been able to write it; the point of my style glided from me on the wax, and life seemed to fail."

"If the crown of sanguinary martyrdom," he said, "was woven of violets and roses, there was a crown of fadeless lilies for the confession of the heart, calm and steadfast

such as hers. Oh, Paula," he ended, "farewell. Sustain, by thy prayers, the failing old age of him who venerates and loves thee. Associated on high with Christ, thy voice will be more availing there, than even amongst us here below."

She was laid in her rocky tomb in the hill-side, near the cave where once had been the sacred manger.

Jerome had more than one inscription engraven on her tomb. One recorded her descent from Scipio, from the Gracchi, and from Agamemnon. "Thou who passest by," another said, "dost thou see this little grave hollowed by the chisel in the rock? It is the transitory sojourning-place of Paula, who dwells in the heavenly kingdom. Below is the cradle of the Christ; a little further the magi offered to the Incarnate God the mystic gifts of faith. Here is the tomb of Paula."

“Holy and blessed, she has fallen asleep on the seventh of the Kalends of February, after the setting of the sun.”

At first Jerome feared that the weight of the rule of the monasteries, which she and her mother had borne together, might be too much for Eustochium alone, and he dreaded having to separate from her also.

But before long the brave heart revived, and Eustochium quietly went back to the work her mother had left her, the double work of governing the convents and aiding Jerome.

She came to him, gently asking explanations of the Book of Ruth. Where her mother had dwelt, and Jerome, she would dwell, their people should be her people, and their God her God.

Amidst the crash, and ruin, and unutterable horror of those times, the memory of

that calm departure, and that sacred love of mother, and child, and friend, seems to keep on earth one gleam of the calm and tender light of the Father's house to which Paula went.

For soon indeed came on Rome the ruin so often prophesied by good men, and twice before threatened by Alaric.

For three days and three nights the city was given up to pillage.

The Aventine palaces were sacked. No exemption from any extremity of woe has been promised the servants of the Crucified, and the devoted band of good women which had gathered around Marcella had to endure the worst.

The very bareness and austerity, which contrasted with the splendour of Marcella's marble courts and gilded halls, was to the Gothic soldiers a proof of hidden treasure.

The works of mercy which had made them bare were unknown to the invaders. All Rome could have borne witness, but all Rome was involved in the same ruin.

Beaten and tortured almost to death, at last they suffered the aged lady to be laid in a church, which had been turned into a hospital, to die.

For herself she said it mattered little; she was old and could not suffer long. But the anguish of pleading in vain for those around her, whom she had so long gathered and protected, as under motherly wings, was too much for her.

One maiden of the Aventine community remained with her, ministering to her to the last.

In a few days that agony of pain, and shame, and vain pity, and death were over: she had reached the solution of all the mysteries, and the noble heart was satisfied.

Little indeed had those lost who had sacrificed home, and wealth, and ease, and luxury to God. For it seemed as if God himself were calling the universal Church into the desert; were plunging the whole corrupt and enervated Roman world into the burning and barren sands of poverty and misery.

The noblest Roman matrons and maidens were sold into slavery in Africa, and Mesopotamia, throughout the world which Rome had ruled so long.

Melania, alone in her cell in the convent on the Mount of Olives, beheld the Apocalypse interpreted before her eyes.

“Babylon is fallen—is fallen! In the cup which she hath filled, fill to her double. She saith in her heart, I sit a queen, and shall see no sorrow, therefore shall her plagues come in one day—death, and mourning, and

famine. What city is like this great city? in one hour she is made desolate? For strong is the Lord God that judgeth her."

"Rejoice over her, thou heaven, and ye holy Apostles and Prophets, for God hath avenged you on her."

Not the Coliseum, but Rome itself, the whole city, became an arena of torture and blood.

But was it thus that Telemachus was avenged, or Agnes, or St. Peter, or St. Paul?

Nay, not thus, I think; but rather by the only vengeance that can be sweet in heaven, the destruction of the evil they died to combat.

Avenged they were, indeed, in the sack of Rome, as far as it was the paralysing of wicked hands no more to do their wicked deeds; in the liberation of forty thousand Gothic slaves; in the dissolution of that hideous alliance of luxury and cruelty;

avenged far more by the holy lives and deaths their life and death had made possible on the Aventine; and by the abolition of the gladiatorial games.

The vengeance of heaven, like the joy of heaven, consists in the redeeming of one sinner that repenteth.

The vengeance of the Christ is in His murderers being forgiven.

The vengeance of God is the binding not of hands from violence, but of hearts to Himself.

The Divine victories are not for overthrow, but for conquest.

The conquests of the Cross are not over the sinner, but the sin.

The death of Fabiola amidst the love and honour of the thousands she had succoured, followed to her sepulchre by the homage of all Rome; the death of Paula in peace,

tenderly cherished by a daughter's hands; and of Jerome, ministered to in dying by Paula's grand-daughter; the death of Marcella, bruised and mocked amidst the Gothic soldiers; of Augustine on the walls of his city, soon to be sacked and burned; of Telemachus, crushed amidst the stones—are but incidents of a moment in their eternal life.

And the fall and rise of nations, the ruin of what we deemed immortal, of Rome herself, are, as Augustine has taught us, but incidents of a moment in the building of the City of God.

The destruction passes, the construction goes on.

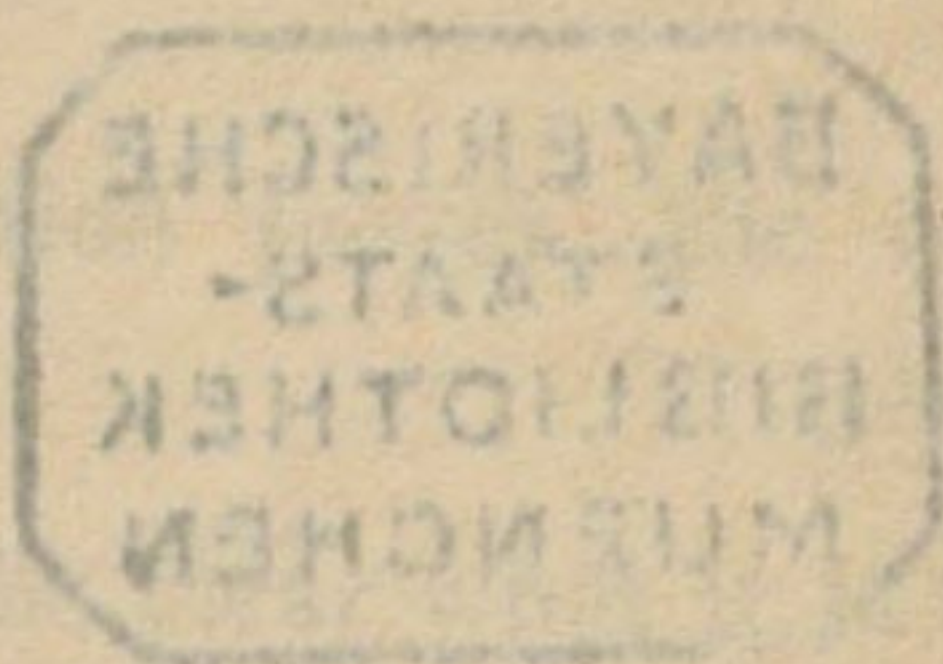
Only let us be clear what it is God would have conquered in us, and in the world, and we shall see that while the Cross remains the weapon, even here, and much

more *there*, where the "reward of virtue" (as Augustine said) "shall be Himself who gave the virtue," the divine watchword remains for ever, "Conquering and to conquer."

THE END.



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